

Lucan: It's time to begin. Bro. David, will you please offer an opening prayer?

Zahakiel: Dear Father in Heaven, We come before you tonight with thanksgiving, receiving the Sabbath blessing according to your divine purpose. May our rejoicing be complete as we receive a fresh outpouring of your Spirit as we fellowship together in the name of your dear Son, for it is in His name we pray. Amen.

Elyna: Amen.

Barb: Amen

Lucan: Amen

Adriel777: Amen

Ruthline: Amen

Peter: Amen

Lucan: Tonight's study will be relatively brief, and is called "Briars and honey." I would like to begin by inviting some participation from those in attendance. I will share a phrase with you, and I would like to know whether you consider it to be positive or negative. Here is the first: "a land of milk and honey."

Does this sound positive or negative to you; i.e. a good place, or a bad place? (You may answer without the C/Q/A convention for this)

Barb: Positive/good

Zahakiel: Positive, but perhaps because I know the verses in which it is used.

Ruthline: Positive

Elyna: +

Lucan: Okay, thanks for sharing. I am inclined towards the same; though I suppose if one didn't know the verses, some might question the milk part. 😊

Peter: Good

Lucan: Here is the second: "a land of briars and thorns."

Lucan: Does this sound positive or negative to you; i.e. a good place, or a bad place?

Pastor Chick: Generally good, but with qualifications

Zahakiel: It sounds negative, because those are the result of sin.

Peter: Positive depends on how you look at it.

Elyna: Connote with bad (trying)

Pastor Chick: Generally bad, especially for humans, but good for rabbits and perhaps other life forms.

Adriel777: Negative to me. Although along the same lines as Pastors thought it could be protective.

Lucan: I would also be inclined to say that is a bad or undesirable place; though Pastor's answer does bring a smile, as that will come up shortly. Generally speaking, "milk and honey" would be blessings, and "briars and thorns" would be curses, from the perspective of humanity.

Now, a question for personal reflection: Which of these would you be inclined to praise Yahweh in the midst of?

In terms of the "good" land, we know that Yahweh promised to Israel an inheritance beyond Jordan "flowing with milk and honey:"

Peter: both

Lucan: "In the day [that] I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which [is] the glory of all lands:" (Eze. 20:6)

There is another mention of milk and honey in this land, however, and it comes after a judgment in the book of Isaiah:

"And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk [that] they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land." (Isaiah 7:21, 22)

The judgment predicted; "in that day;" is one in which Yahweh would judge Israel and Syria, and eventually carry away Israel to be forever scattered in Assyrian captivity. We read a bit earlier:

"And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, [that] Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it." (Isaiah 7:1)

It was this alliance that ultimately lead to Israel being taken captive and erased from the earth as a people. Yet to the remnant in the house of Judah afterwards, we find written to those who remain in the land that there shall be an abundance of milk, with butter and honey becoming the diet.

Yet what type of land is producing this milk and honey? Is it a "good" land?

Lucan: The passage continues:

"It shall happen in that day, [That] wherever there could be a thousand vines [Worth] a thousand [shekels] of silver, It will be for briers and thorns. With arrows and bows [men] will come there, because all the land will become briers and thorns. And to any hill which could be dug with the hoe, You will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; But it will become a range for oxen and a place for sheep to roam." (Isaiah 7:23-25; NKJV)

As we may see, in this case the land of "milk and honey" and the land of "briars and thorns" are one and the same. The briars and thorns prevent the scorched land from bearing its rich fruits, yet the promise is that the cattle and sheep will produce milk from the grass; so much so as to make the diet one of milk and honey.

We may be inclined to see the experience of "milk and honey" as good, and "briars and thorns" as bad, yet Yahweh allows them both; He blesses His people in the midst of affliction, and brings one from the other. We cannot receive the blessings of milk and honey if we curse the experiences of briars and thorns through which they are provided.

As we read elsewhere:

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing [this], that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have [her] perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." (James 1:2-4)

Briars and thorns are not pleasant, just as trials to the flesh are not pleasant. As Bro. David rightly pointed out, both are the results of sin. Yet it is not "pleasantness" that is the promise of faith, but peace in the midst of trial through faith. We "count it all joy," not because the trials are joyful, but because we know the end result of it is measured by the perfect hand of Yahweh. It is our rejoicing and peace in the midst of trial that distinguishes us as the servants of Yahweh; it is this "Sabbath rest" that "marks us" His peculiar people.

Adriel777: Amen

Lucan: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:1, 2)

Truly, verse 1 would be sufficient; to be justified and given peace with God is of greater importance than all else in existence, as any soul who has truly felt the weight of sin will testify. Yet more than this, we also have access to Yahweh and Yahshua by faith, and stand firmly in their grace. As it is truly promised, "Blessed [are] they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

This is surely also cause for rejoicing, yet the apostle goes further still for those who have been filled:

"And not only [so], but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Romans 5:3-5)

This word, "glory," means to boast, to rejoice, to exalt. We are to rejoice in our trials, not as though the experience were a pleasant one, but as the experience is a gift from Yahweh through which we are enabled to grow and bless others, either by our example or by the revelation and cleansing of sin within us. Every trial and difficulty comes to us through infinite love; the blow that comes to us comes through Christ.

We read an insightful passage regarding Christ, and thus, Christ in us:

"The Father's presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. The blow that is aimed at him falls upon the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence. Whatever comes to him comes from Christ. He has no need to resist evil, for Christ is his defense. Nothing can touch him except by our Lord's permission, and "all things" that are permitted "work together for good to them that love God." (Romans 8:28)" [MB 71]

It is with this mind – the mind of Christ – (1Cor 2:16) that we obey the instruction:

"Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." (Phil. 2:14, 15)

How it is that we "shine?"

By doing all things "without murmurings and disputings." So far from this, we "take joy;" we rejoice in the work and providence of Yahweh in our trials, for every trial can only benefit us as we overcome it.

And where is the possibility of not overcoming it?

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Romans 8:35-37)

Adriel777: Amen!

Lucan: Christ has made us "more than conquerors" in all things; we more than conquer over tribulation, over persecution, over distress, over famine, peril, annoyance, inconvenience, provocation, etc. One may know what it is to "conquer;" yet in Christ, we "more than conquer." To conquer, one must engage in warfare and strive for the possibility of victory. Yet to us it is given to be "more than" this:

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, [even] our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1John 5:4, 5)

We do not war for the victory; we stand in the victory which has been warred for. We do not struggle to overcome; we more than overcome, as Christ has already overcome for us.

Briars may sting, but they cannot kill, for our life is hid with Christ in God.

Elyna: Amen

Lucan: Thorns may tempt to annoyance, yet we are given to rejoice in these temptations, for in overcoming we reveal the character of Yahshua which - unlike these painful things - can never fade or be corrupted. The redeemed have Sabbath rest while enduring the fury of hell; we are surrounded by briars and thorns, yet fed with milk and honey from within their midst. We "more than conquer," for though we endure the trial closely, we know it cannot touch a hair of our heads without our Father's loving permission.

As it is written, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [art] with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." (Psalms 23:4, 5)

This is a testimony that the world cannot give; it is the reason that the songs of martyrs win converts from among their persecutors. Much like the original recipients of the promises in Isaiah, persecution from an alliance of our former brethren with worldly powers brings forth both a curse and the blessing within it. As laborers in our Father's vineyard, we often speak with other Seventh-day Adventists; a land in which we might have expected "a thousand vines worth a thousand pieces of silver," yet are frequently met with only briars and thorns. As we reach out to these - even those who become our oppressors - it is our privilege to reveal the peace that has been given to us, even in the midst of affliction.

Yahshua rejoices in uplifting the most degraded to be worthy of the courts of Heaven by fitting them with His Spirit. Satan exults in degrading the most uplifted to be unfit for the courts of Heaven by imbibing his spirit. In other words, Satan would turn a land of milk and honey into briars and thorns; Yahweh allows those briars and thorns, and brings forth even more milk and honey from their midst.

It is thus that the greatest light shines in the darkest places; as it is written, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." (Isaiah 9:2)

We read of such a time in the Testimonies, in which we now live:

"Now is the time for God's people to show themselves true to principle. When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason." [5T 136]

It is this work to which we are called and fully equipped; nothing short of revealing the love and character of Christ in the midst of gross spiritual insensibility and love of sin, even – and especially – among those who have abandoned their post. Our protests, our labors, and our work are not for ourselves, but for those who are soon to meet their Judge without an excuse for what they have done to Him in the person of His saints.

In the midst of persecution, of trial, and of opposition, we may rejoice in the peace of Yahweh, and the blessings of milk and honey with which we are fed. We are thus given both the instruction and the promise:

"Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6, 7)

The instruction is to be anxious for nothing and to make our requests with thanksgiving; the promise does not necessarily say that every request that is made known will be answered according to our desire. It does say, on the Word upon which the heavens hang, that the peace of Yahweh will keep our hearts and minds. To experience and reveal peace, regardless of whether or not our desires are met, is indeed that which "passeth all understanding."

As it is written a few verses later:

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4:11-13)

May we rejoice not only in our blessings, but in the trials that allow those blessings to shine forth more abundantly.

“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: [Which is] a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.” (2 Thess. 1:4, 5)

Lucan: Are there any comments on the study tonight?

Adriel777: Amen

Kim: C

Lucan: Go ahead.

Kim: It's interesting that the Bible says we should resist the Devil, but EGW says we don't need to resist evil because we trust in Christ's victory.

Lucan: Do you see a contradiction there?

Kim: No. She's showing how to resist the Devil.

Adriel777: 😊

Kim: At first it seemed to contradict, but then I realized this like the verses that say we are not saved by works and also we are saved by works.

Lucan: I think that is a good parallel. 😊 I am also inclined to think, in some cases, of a difference in resisting "evil" vs resisting "the devil" that causes the evil. For example, if a man comes up and begins accosting me, he would be doing "evil," but I do not need to resist the man necessarily; he is not my enemy. But, Satan that inspired the man. In that case, we do not resist "the evil," as though we wrestled against flesh and blood.

Lucan: Any others? If not, I'll ask Pastor to offer a closing prayer.

Elyna: Amen

Pastor Chick: Dear Father in Heaven. We thank You for Your Great Light in the midst of the darkest generation of earth's history. We praise You for feeding us abundantly in a barren land. May our rejoicing be as a tsunami of glory that converts hearts to the Light of Truth. In Yahshua's holy name, Amen.

Zahakiel: Amen.

Barb: Amen

Peter: a

Adriel777: Amen

Lucan: Amen

8-24-2018 Briars and Honey

Ruthline: Amen

Peter: Amen

Kim: Amen

Elyna: Amen

daphna dee: Amen