

Wednesday, November 6, 2013 – Profile in Courage

In 1957 a book was published with the title “Profiles in Courage” using short biographies about eight U.S. senators, from throughout history, who crossed party lines and/or defied the opinion of their constituents to do what they felt was right. The acts, in the book, are described as brave and courageous because those men “suffered severe” criticism and lost popularity because of their actions. While this is a definition of courage, their sacrifice pales in comparison to a woman I knew: a woman named Jane.

My family and I have known Jane for the last two years. We didn’t know her as well as most at church and that is our loss. We won’t be privileged enough to know her any better or share any more time with her. Jane died last Saturday night after an 11 year battle with cancer. Her courage lasted to her final breath.

One, who is a student of the psalms, as Jane was, understands that David gives valuable, needful, and precious information on suffering the hardships of life. Psalms 6, 62 and 69 provide an abundance of helpful information on how to endure as a person suffering with a serious illness. Jane must have had these chapters etched on her heart because, to a person, her battle with cancer never once caused her faith in God to waiver.

The psalms provide us an understanding that the psalmist had first-hand knowledge regarding suffering. His suffering increased his understanding of his own mortality, as it should all of us, as well as his need for God, as we all need to understand. His suffering caused him to reflect upon his own sin, and motivated him to look to God for forgiveness, strength and an ability to endure. Christians understand that this world is not our home. Jane knew that we must be a people that plan for our spiritual future (Phil. 3:20). How do we plan?

First, we need to understand who God is. When you read these three psalms, you are impressed with the high conception David had of God: (1) he is the source of mercy (Ps. 6:2, 4; 62:12; 69:13, 16); (2) he is the source of strength (Ps. 62:7, 11); (3) he is the source of deliverance (Ps. 6:2, 4); (4) he is the source of salvation (Ps. 62:4, 6, 7; 69:1, 13, 29); (5) he is the source of judgment upon my oppressors (Ps. 6:10; 62:12; 69:22-28); (6) he is the source of refuge (Ps. 62:7, 8); and (7) Because he is such a God, I can take it to the Lord in prayer (Ps. 6:1-6, 9; 69:13). David prayed for (1) God not to rebuke and chasten him in anger and hot displeasure (Ps. 6:1); (2) deliverance from his illness (Ps. 6:4); (3) God to hear him (Ps. 69:13); (4) deliverance from his enemies (Ps. 69:14); (5) that the flood not overflow him, nor the deep swallow him, and let not the pit shut its mouth on him (Ps. 69:15); (6) He further calls for God to answer him,

implying that God is actually listening to his frantic cries (Ps. 69:16); (7) that God not hide his face from him (Ps. 69:17); (8) that God would redeem his soul (Ps. 69:18); (9) and that God's salvation would set him on high (Ps. 69:29).

In Psalm 69:3 David cried "How long?" Physically he was wasting away, and his bones were vexed. Spiritually he was greatly discouraged. It was only natural for him to ask God how long he had to endure such trauma. His hope was upon God. In Psalm 62:5, he spoke of misplaced hope such as trusting in riches. Psalm 62:10 says that it is all too easy to place our hope in a good insurance plan or in medical science. The world also tells you to place your hope in anything other than God. If we place our trust anywhere but in God and lose our battle with suffering, we will lose everything even our soul. We need to wait silently for Him (Ps. 62:1, 5; 69). Without doubt this is the most difficult of all; we simply do not do silence. David had that amazing quality that enabled him to pray to God and then silently wait for an answer.

Second, we need to remember who we are. In Psalm 69:6 David wanted to suffer in such a way others would not be shaken in faith. It is very easy to make excuses for ungodly actions or thoughts when we deal with serious illness assuming that gives us a "built in excuse." Jane's sweet nature provided a wonderful example of knowing who she was: God's! From her attitude to her continued attendance in the services of the Lord's church up to the end, Jane knew the example she was setting for others through her actions. God and His people were her refuge. We can trust God at all times for he is our refuge (Ps. 62:7-8; 46:1-3). The original word "refuge" (here and Ps. 46:1) appears 12 times in psalms and translates a word which describes shelter in the time of storm. We could make a list of times when we must trust in God, but we do not need a list for David instructs us to trust him at all times.

Third, Jane knew that one day her suffering would cease. David knew that God would deliver him from his suffering (Ps. 6:9; 69:14, 30). That does not always mean that we shall recover. So we had better do as Isaiah said, "Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live" (Isaiah 38:2). Jane knew where her eternal home would be: heaven.

The Psalmist exclaimed, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Psa. 107:2).

The strength of conviction and the depth of character and courage may not be known until they are tested. It is in the midst of those tests that we find how strong or how weak we are. In fact, it is in such trials that we find who we really are. "When faithfulness is most difficult, it is most necessary." Thank you Jane for showing us how Christians should act in the darkest of life's struggles!