

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Conditions a Christian will face: Loneliness

Recently I was reading of the overall population of our planet. The numbers were fantastic and increasing year by year. In spite of this there are thousands upon thousands living lives of loneliness. This is in areas of high numbers; in cities where people live almost on top of one another. The saddest part of this is that it leads to depression and in many cases, a step further, to suicide. We are not thinking for the moment of Christianity or of anything vaguely religious, but of the world around us. The very pursuits and pleasures that are popular seem to make for loneliness. Men and women long for friendship but it eludes them. Just visualise some young man spending time and energy on pleasures and, in some cases, very questionable ones. He returns home at the end, maybe to an isolated flat without comfort, and sits down desperately lonely.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT LONELINESS?

Now the main thrust of our talk today is the way the Christian faces the problem of loneliness. Let's consult our Bible first. What help does it give? We must all be interested in what it says because it is God's word. In the beginning of our Bible we find the account of how God created the world and formed it to put man upon it. He provided all that was necessary for his enjoyment and happiness. Listen to what the Bible actually says, "*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth*" (Genesis 1:26). The first man was Adam and he gave names to all the animals that God had made. So Adam was the head of all that God had brought into being. However there was one thing that was not according to God's mind. Adam was **alone**.

In Genesis 2:18 we read, "*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*". So God did provide a wife for Adam. Listen to a little more from Genesis 2, "*And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man*". This is the institution of marriage. Our talk today is not on marriage exactly but it gives us a very good start to our subject. God, the Creator had every consideration for the happiness and the benefit of those He had put upon the earth.

WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT SAY ABOUT LONELINESS

In the New Testament, in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians he mentions the very theme we have referred to from Genesis. Tied up with what he says about the closeness of the marriage bond is another wonderful truth, "*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church*". Most of us are acquainted with the word 'Church'. It has nothing to do with the building at the end of the road. It is a spiritual house composed of living stones and all believers belong to it. The Church is also described as the body of which Christ is the Head. Every believer is united to Him and to one another. Listen to the following verse, "*For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones*" (Ephesians 5:30). Another scripture says, "*members one of another*" (Romans 12:5). God never had in His plan any thought of loneliness but rather fellowship.

It doesn't matter how long we have been a Christian; we might think we are ever so mature, but this feeling of being lonely can be very real. There is the attitude in the world around us of going with the crowd; there isn't any real difficulty with that. It is like going with the current of the river; we are swept along. You just do what everyone else is doing. The individual has no mind of his own. We see it all around us nowadays. In public places there are crowds of young people all acting in the same way according to a norm of behaviour.

Let's start off by considering a believer just recently converted. Whether we like it or not he is now different! The Bible says so. This may seem very hard to a new believer; it is, however, true. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 (JN Darby translation), it says, "*So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.*" Christians also have the indwelling Spirit. We may not feel any different outwardly but inwardly we begin to feel that our old ways are not consistent with our new found faith. How do we deal with this? This is maybe

the beginning of the experience of being lonely. This becomes personal! I must have the courage to tell my old friends that I have become a Christian. That may be all right then, but when I must tell them that I can't go where I used to go or do the things I once did; what happens to the old friendships now? there may be the cold shoulder and I begin to experience loneliness.

It may not appear a very great consolation now, but most, if not all Christians pass this way sooner or later. There is a reproach connected with faith in Christ: it isn't the popular way. Later on in our talk today we shall think about the loneliness of the Lord Jesus. There was never any one as lonely as He. The strange thing is that the Bible teaches us that there is a happiness connected with this! Just listen to a few words from the Apostle Peter on this theme, "*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye*" (1 Peter 4:14). So taking a different course isn't all gloom; it spells out real happiness. The happiness of the unsaved is transient, it doesn't last. When circumstances turn against them, and the problems of life affect them, very often the happiness deserts them.

Have we lost our old friends? One thing is certain Christians need company. The Bible calls it fellowship! This is not based upon the fact that we all like going to the same places and doing the same things. It is because we all share the same life. In reality Christ has become our life. This is a new bond entirely. However it is not always plain sailing; many of us are shy and reserved by nature and it becomes difficult to make new friendships. The Bible does encourage us to seek Christian fellowship. This is the escape from loneliness. The Christian faith is based on this. As we have already said, believers are 'one body' composed of many members. Most Christians become attached to a church or to some place where they will find others of the same mind. But even in what we think is the ideal situation it can still be difficult if we are not good at mixing with others. The speaker can remember in his younger days, being encouraged to go to places where other Christians gathered. There was usually some instruction given by a speaker and this proved to be very profitable. However, when this was over, there would be an awkwardness, I didn't know anyone, and in early days, went home not having spoken to a soul. At that point we may become discouraged, even complaining, 'nobody spoke to me'. It happens doesn't it?

Let's join the other side for a while, shall we? We have all attended the gathering referred to for a long time. There are lots of believers of all ages there with so much in common and we get along together very well. Now! One evening someone comes in who we have never seen before. They appear to be by themselves looking a little isolated. Maybe there is a remark or two among ourselves, 'I wonder who that is?' What should we do? The matter of loneliness is two sided. The only answer to this problem is that love must prevail and every step be taken to make the newcomers feel that they are welcome. It maybe, where it is possible, hospitality is one way of showing that love of Christ to those who feel for the moment, 'out of it'.

THE LONELINESS OF THE LORD JESUS.

Thinking then about the Lord Jesus; He knew what it was to be lonely. In fact there was no other person who experienced this to the extent that He did. There were many occasions when He spoke of this. We must remember, however, that he was the Son of God and all power was in His hand. Yet He humbled Himself and came into this world to reach people who were lonely. It was because He knew loneliness that He was able to help those who were lonely. There were times like this recorded in His life. Let's just think of one. We read that "*every man went to his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives*". Did He not have a home to go to? Listen to His own words, "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head*" (Matthew 8:20). There are not many of us who have been in that situation. He was shunned by the very people He came to bless; they tried again and again to catch Him out in the things He said. Christians do often find themselves in similar situations, but not as Jesus felt them. However, very real to them. On one occasion some of the disciples of Jesus left Him. We read, "*Then said Jesus unto the twelve, (apostles) will ye also go away?*" You can feel the pathos in the Lord's words. There are some very striking words in the Old Testament in Psalm 102:7; "*I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top*". Because our Saviour passed through the trial of loneliness Himself, he is able to sympathise with us in similar problems. As Christians we have the privilege of praying in all circumstances of our lives, so when the feeling of loneliness presses down upon us there is help available. We may always, "*find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus experienced intensely another character of loneliness which we will never have to face. This was upon the cross when bearing our sins. It wasn't only that men shunned Him, but God forsook Him. Just listen to His words, "*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying...My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" (Matthew 27:46). These sufferings have become the foundation of our salvation. We read in another place, "*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*" (1 Peter 3:18).

THE LONELINESS OF THE DISCIPLES OF THE LORD JESUS

The Lord Jesus called twelve disciples around him when here in the world. They were the objects of His love. Not only had He called them, but He referred to them as, "*the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world*" (John 17:6).. There

was a deep attachment between them and Himself. It became a great sorrow to them when He told them that He was to leave them. He said to them, *“Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart”* (John 16:6). As they thought of how cruelly their Master had been treated they were very afraid. They would be alone and surrounded by many who would hate them as they had hated Jesus. Nevertheless He left with them many promises before He went back to His Father. As Christians, even in the year 2003 we can claim these same promises for ourselves. Maybe someone listening to this broadcast is passing through the trauma of loneliness now. The disciples were assured of His constant love in every detail of life. Listen, *“I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you”* (John 14:18). Jesus is not referring here to His coming again in the future, but **now**, right in the midst of our feelings of loneliness! Words like these are multiplied time and again in the Bible; Here is another, *“for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). Although we have thought of the loneliness of Jesus He could speak of His Father being with Him. *“And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him”* (John 8:29).

Make sure you have a Bible; it is indispensable to a believer in the Lord Jesus. We must read it every day and believe it with all our hearts, its message is unchanging and no one can really challenge it's truth.

THE PROMISE OF THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER

Now we will go back to the Gospel of John and think again of those disciples being left without their Master. Listen to these words of encouragement, *“If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”* (John 14:16). We have said quite a lot about the promise of the Lord Jesus being with us; who then is this Comforter we have read of? Probably you know the answer to my question already. It is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Every believer in the Lord Jesus possesses this gift. When you believed the Gospel you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The verse just quoted from John 14 is worth a closer look. Jesus said *“another Comforter”*. The word *“another”* means another of the same kind! The disciples had experienced the love, care and consideration from Jesus Himself for three and half years, and now He was going away. The presence of the Comforter with them would be the same, no less care or consideration for them than Jesus had shown.

There is no need for despair, no matter how bad things may seem to be. Fellowship and company with other believers is needful. Every believer has the privilege of prayer. Let's use it to the full. It will bring peace into our lives instead of turmoil. Make time for reading the Bible prayerfully and carefully. We pray that this message will be helpful to all who listen, particularly those who are feeling lonely because of varying and unexpected circumstances. May the Lord Jesus be with you.

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