

PASTOR'S CORNER

April 22, 2010

When I was little, my parents made all six of us kids read one hour every day. This was in the dark ages before computers, Wiis, Blackberrys, Ipods, Ipads, Xboxes, Slingboxes, VCRs, DVDs, and color TVs. We had other ways to play, but for one hour every day we had to sit and read a book. As adults, all six of us still read. Whenever we get together, one topic we often discuss is, "What book are you reading?" You may think that our parents did this out of a love for the written word, and the desire to improve the lives of their children. But after we became adults, they told us the real reason why the six of us had to read one hour every day: They just wanted a little peace and quiet, that's all. It was for their benefit, not ours.

God does marvelous deeds, and the resurrection is the greatest example. Still, these things happen not for our benefit, but for God's. Once we understand that, it changes us.

At the time of the prophet Ezekiel, the chosen people were devastated. They had lost the promised land that Moses had worked 40 years to reach. Their Temple had been destroyed. They were scattered among different nations, where they lived as exiles. God said this happened because they didn't keep their part of the covenant. They committed violence against their neighbor, and they worshiped false gods. So God went in and messed up their lives. But a funny thing happened. God's image got damaged. Other nations were saying, "What kind of a God do these people have if they cannot keep their own homeland?" Foreigners said these events happened not because the people were sinful, but because their God was powerless. So God brought Israel back home, not for their sakes, but for his own, so that other nations would know who is God.

Still, God expected some changes. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you," God says, "to cleanse you from all your impurities. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. You shall be my people, and I will be your God." God did not reward the people for having a change of heart; God changed their hearts so that he could have a little peace and quiet.

People still wonder, what kind of a God lets bad things happen? We all know people who have overcome obstacles. They have endured physical handicaps, addictions to illegal substances, or personal tragedy. God is not in the obstacle; God is in the overcoming. People who understand that change. They step aside from the grief, the anxiety, the bitterness, and say, "OK, Lord. If you're so great, do it, but do it for your sake. Be good to me, so that others may believe in you. Let them rejoice not in what I have done, but in what you now do."

This Easter season God does wonderful things. He raises Jesus from the dead, and he bestows new life on those who are baptized. God brings us through sacrifice, through our sin, and through any adversity. When we get there, it feels like it's for our good, but it is for God's glory. When we understand that, we can focus less on what we think we need, and trust more in what God has in mind.

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