

Days After Wife's Death, Bill Johnson Says We Must all 'Rejoice Always'

Through tears and laughter, Pastor Bill Johnson exhorted his family at Bethel Church to remember the Lord's faithfulness to His Word, promises and deeds in the wake of his wife Beni's promotion to heaven after years of battling cancer through prayer and treatment.

To applause and a shout of "We love you, Bill," Johnson encouraged with Scripture and story-telling the hearts of worshippers in Redding, California, and around the world on Sunday, three days after his 67-year-old wife, mother and co-pastor passed from earth to heaven on July 14.

He thanked people who prayed day and night for Beni Johnson outside their home, and around the world as urgent requests for healing spread from Redding. "For the prayer, I will owe you for the rest of my life for that.

"I'm so thankful that this story—this journey—didn't end when Beni was taken to heaven," Johnson said in his sermon to the entire Bethel family.

"I will never forget—for all my life—the moment, that priceless moment of giving thanks. Then to have her taken, escorted into eternity," Johnson said through tears.

Though prayer warriors held vigils at the Johnson's home and urgent pleas circled the globe for Beni Johnson's healing, God answered differently.

"The backslider in heart will always judge God by what He didn't do," Johnson said beginning his sermon. "But those who run with tenderness for who He is will always define Him by

what He has said, what He has promised and what He has done," he added.

Bill Johnson said he'd seen too much of God's kindness to think He is anything other than absolutely good, even though His sons and daughters experience trials and trouble in this world.

"He says things like, 'Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.' Those verses are completely useless unless you're going to experience loss and disappointment," Johnson said.

He continued, "The level of revelation God gives you will always be equal to the level of mystery you're willing to live with. And the inability to live with mystery is your resistance to child-likeness. It's child-likeness that gives us access to dimensions and realms of the kingdom that you can't get in any other way."

Johnson related a discovery he made years ago while reading the 23rd Psalm. The writer, David, penned the words, "In the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me."

"What I found is there are measures of His presence that you can only find in the valley of the shadow of death. He's not a vending machine. I don't get to put in a quarter and get out of it what I want. It's a relational journey. I've experienced His kindness, His miracles at a level I could never earn or deserve," Johnson said.

"I just don't have the right to reevaluate what He is like because I've experienced loss. It doesn't work that way," Johnson added, his voice quivering.

A fifth-generation pastor, Bill Johnson shared memories of losing his dad. "When my dad died, I experienced something at a deeper level than ever before. I experienced loss. The

disappointment is huge. The pain is annoying. I'll never have any of that in heaven," he said.

Joy in the midst of loss, celebration in pain and giving up the right to understand are priceless gifts to God.

"It's not forced to give Him thanks and celebrate His presence with all of you this morning," Johnson said.

"It almost sounds contradictory to honor Him as the Healer when you've just lost somebody you love through a disease, It's not fake, hype. This is who He is," Johnson said.

Among the many books Beni Johnson authored, one bestseller focused on miracles through the power of Jesus' shed blood and broken body in communion.

In many ways, Bill Johnson said he feels like the richest guy on the planet because his mourning is shared by the Bethel family.

Of his immediate family, Bill Johnson said: "We've been together hour after hour day after day. Some of them moved in with me. They're everywhere. Wherever there's a couch, there's a body," he said laughing.

Citing Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted," Bill Johnson said biblical mourning "will either take you to the Comforter—the presence of the Holy Spirit—or it will take you to unbelief."

He pointed to Mark 16 which tells the story of Mary Magdalene who, after seeing the risen Lord, went and told the disciples as they mourned and wept. When they heard that Jesus was alive and had been seen by Mary, they did not believe.

"In this journey that I'm in right now," Johnson said, "I found language for this that I never knew in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. The verse states that some people sorrow without hope, which is best defined as the 'joyful anticipation of good,'

not wishful thinking.

"Biblical mourning must be enhanced with hope or it will lead to unbelief," Bill Johnson said.

He also read Hebrews 12:1 which relates a great cloud of witnesses, people who've gone to heaven, the heroes of faith mentioned in chapter 11. Bill Johnson then shared John 2:24 in which Jesus says, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone."

"Two things have come to my mind in these last several days. Every loss and disappointment can be a seed that brings increase," Bill Johnson said.

"I'm thankful for you and her death was the end of one part of my life. I can't pretend otherwise. But in the bigger picture it's the beginning of something else," he added.

Bill Johnson shared that, before his wife went to heaven, revivalist and prayer leader Lou Engle called, requesting a meeting with them. In a 20-minute meeting with Engle, Beni Johnson laid hands on and prayed for revival through rediscovering the power in communion. *The Power of Communion: Accessing Miracles Through the Body and Blood of Jesus* is one of Beni Johnson's numerous published books. For some time, Engle and his team believe the Lord had been speaking to them about a "Great Communion Revival" coming to the United States.

An arm wrapped around Bill Johnson, Bethel Pastor Kris Vallotton led prayer for the entire family. "I don't know how he preaches this profound message in the midst of his pain. We pray that the seeds of (Beni Johnson's) life would bear fruit," Vallotton said.

A memorial celebration of Beni Johnson's life is scheduled for Aug. 5, at the Redding Civic Auditorium beginning at 1 p.m. {eoa}

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