

How God Remembers You

Blind and frail, her wiry, white hair stirred ever so slightly by a faint, hot breeze, the old German missionary came slowly toward me. She could not possibly have known I was there with two Africans, watching her tap her way slowly across the baked, grassless “lawn” of the guesthouse.

“Who is she?” I asked.

“Bible translator. Now she has river blindness.”

“She will die?”

“Yes. She will die. She is going back to Germany. She will die there.”

“What did she do here?” I asked.

“She put the Bible into two languages.”

“All by herself?”

“All by herself.”

“Now she goes home to die in Germany.”

“All by herself.”

The unfairness—the lonely, blind, painful unfairness of it—swamped me. I stood there, slowly sinking into a bottomless marsh of injustice.

She should have been on a dais at a head table, receiving honors and applause and the undying gratitude of thousands. A sightless Lufthansa flight and a few months unvisited in a ward where impoverished old ladies die seemed the wrong ending for a holy life full of great kingdom accomplishments.

Then, as though I could hear her thoughts—or were they

God's?—I seemed to find relief, even joy, in Paul's words, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12, KJV).

God's Ways Are Not Our Ways

The Bible nowhere promises Christ's ambassadors some rose-petaled aisleway of safety through suffering. Indeed, Scriptures such as Psalm 34:19 say the exact opposite: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous."

Even the most righteous among us will "suffer these things," as Paul says. However we try to impose upon God our limited human fairness doctrines, He will not submit.

In our reasoning, the mother of three must have three identical candy bars or none at all. If she has only one, it must be divided equally, with a ruler, while all three kibitz. We cannot imagine that mother standing her youngest before the other two and, without apparent merit, awarding him alone candy.

"Watch," she admonishes the two candy-bar-less siblings. "Look how your brother relishes that gooey chocolate. See the obvious delight in his eyes, the salacious way he licks his lips. Rejoice with him and be glad."

Yet that is precisely what God does. He lifts one to prominence and public blessing, plants his feet in a broad place and anoints his ministry before the eyes of the world.

Another pours out his life in the jungle, and the Peruvian Air Force shoots down his plane, killing his wife and child. Ministry, hardship, suffering, blessing, miracles, signs, wonders and unspeakable agony seem all jumbled in the fruit basket of life, which defies our cozy explanations and tidy little formulas of faith.

Only one word—*nevertheless*—will make sense of it all and bring a victorious joyful meaning to it, for that word scatters the midnight of temporal confusion with the dawn of eternal significance. Satan has practiced his arguments, learned his lines well and never misses an opportunity to plunge the dagger deep into the soft, defenseless tissue of our pain.

“You see,” he says, “there is your God for you. You see how He is. He lets you work like a slave, pour out your heart, preach till you drop, pray without ceasing, and He rewards you with a church split, angry elders and rabid sheep tearing your flesh to shreds. Do you deny these facts?”

“No.”

“Are you or are you not suffering?” Satan asks.

“I am.”

“Well, what do you have to say to this fine mess?” he mocks.

If our wounded confusion is on one side of this grand word, what is on the other? We stand unmoved on *nevertheless*.

The weight of our apparently unrewarded labors so oppressive in their density is on one side of this word. On the other rests an unchanging and unchangeable biblical truth.

Nothing Will Be Lost

In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul gives us a two-part anthem to follow his *nevertheless*. Either part is, by itself, wonderful; but together they are magnificent:

“I know whom I have believed,” Paul says. In the midst of trial by fire, who God is remains the greater, infinitely greater truth than what is happening.

Plant your faith in the miracles of God, and you are ripe for satanic attack. Anchor your soul in the God of miracles, and

circumstances can never dislodge your hope.

Whom you have believed may someday be all you have to cling to. The thing is, it will be enough.

“And am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Your life, faith and labors of love on Christ’s behalf are not lost under the clutter of papers on God’s disheveled desk. Regardless of what you may think just now, what you may actually hear Satan screaming in your ear, God keeps, carefully and lovingly, all that is committed into His hands.

Nothing is lost. Nothing is even temporarily mislaid. On that day, at that lovely dawn of clear bright truth, it will be right there where you put it, in His hands.

This part of the passage might well be translated top side down to read, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which He has committed unto me against that day.”

Read that way it brings sweet assurance that God will not put any burden or any calling, responsibility or ministry in my hands that He will not keep in His. The ultimate responsibility for the outcome is not mine—but His. My responsibility is to intentionally place back in His hands all that He puts in mine.

This is not just for the dying missionary, but for all who have felt unappreciated. The mom whose daily sacrifices are so carelessly trod upon by those for whom she labors. The steady-Freddy—the lusterless, unimaginative husband and father who pays the mortgage, hits the backyard grounders and attends the PTA.

It’s true for the retired executive who wonders if his former employees remember or appreciate his efforts to keep them all on the payroll through three recessions. It’s true for the

inner-city teacher who watches her dedicated creativity oozing its lifeblood on the floor of a dirty, gray classroom full of sneakered barbarians who care nothing about her heroic efforts to ignite some spark of life in them.

In the jeering din of demonic accusations of wastage, we can whisper the one great word that puts the enemy to flight and lights the corners of the room for all the unappreciated: “Nevertheless.”

I know who my God is, and I am eternally convinced He will not let anything go unseen or unrewarded. When Satan tenderly drapes the dreary, but oh, so delicious afghan of self-pity around our slumping shoulders and begins to whisper, we need not let him even finish his sentence.

“What about all the ... ?”

Nevertheless.

“Who will repay all the ... ?”

Nevertheless.

“Look, they all forgot your ... “

Nevertheless.

Read a companion devotional.

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