

Strengthening Your Spirit for a Season of Shaking and Pruning

The Christian life has many seasons, and some are more easily embraced than others. In John 14-17 Jesus was preparing His disciples for a change in the season. Up to this point, the disciples had operated under an open heaven, where Jesus stated in Luke 10:18-19:

“I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Look, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. And nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:18-19).

The disciples had experienced unprecedented fruitfulness in healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons and preaching the Good News of God’s kingdom to the multitudes. They ministered in an environment of unusual growth and favor.

However, since Peter’s confession of His messianic identity and the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus started proclaiming His soon-coming rejection, beating, scourging and crucifixion. Jesus referred to this period in Luke 22:53 as “the hour of the power of darkness” when Satan would enter Judas and initiate the tragic events. During His final meal with the disciples, Jesus was working to emotionally prepare them for a coming shift. Crucifixion was only hours away, and the disciples were soon to have a different experience in the grace of God. In John 15, Jesus describes this season as one of pruning, when the disciples would experience unprecedented loss and disillusionment, revealing many of the fault lines just below the surface.

Shaking was coming, and Jesus had His hands full with His

leadership team. The future of the movement was in the hands of a team filled with betrayal, pride and competition. Peter had allowed Satan to speak through him, bringing the open rebuke of the Master. He had in mind the things of man and not of God. James and John had a murderous spirit in wanting to call down fire and destroy a Samaritan village and, afterward, asked to sit at Jesus' right and left hand ruling over humanity for all eternity. The other disciples, bothered that James and John had asked first, picked back up an argument that began six months prior over who was the greatest. In fact, Luke's Gospel informs us that the disciples were still arguing over this during the Passover meal. The disciples were confident enough in the fruitful season to argue over who is the greatest, yet would their confidence remain in the coming trouble?

Over the next three days, the disciples would face an Earth-shaking crisis. Since the temptation in the wilderness, Satan had been waiting for a more opportune time. Now, the hour of darkness had come. Jesus would be crucified. The ones who left everything to follow Jesus would become confused and disoriented. Peter would deny Him. Thomas would become cynical. And John would be given the responsibility of walking Mary through the trauma of witnessing her son's death. Others would become disillusioned and go back to their previous occupations.

Jesus had to prepare His team for the coming trouble. Many things would be revealed in the storm of the crucifixion.

The God of the Cross

Jesus then spoke comfort straight to the disciples' hearts, "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in Me" (John 14:1). He recognized the sincerity of their faith in God. They had witnessed His signs and wonders. Their faith was sincere, yet He was wanting to form something

deeper. They believed in a theoretical concept of God, but could they believe in the God of Jesus, even when that belief involved an unjust trial by night and a cruel Roman cross? Their view of God was about to be challenged in the person of Jesus. Their idealistic views of triumphalism without pain would be washed away with the stain of Messiah's blood on a crossbeam, nails, and dirt. It is one thing to believe in God when all is prosperous. It is quite another thing to believe in God when the promises look shattered and Messiah hangs limp between two thieves. Saul of Tarsus stumbled over this very aspect of God's nature. Saul had no room in his theology for a suffering and dying Messiah. Remember Saul's conversion experience.

"He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?' He said, 'Who are You, Lord?' The Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads'" (Acts 9:4-5).

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go your way. For this man is a chosen vessel of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the sons of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake'" (Acts 9:15-16, emphasis added).

Do we have a view of God that allows for the crucifixion of His beloved Son? The disciples are headed into an intense three-day period where their Messiah will die and Jesus will be seen no more. Jesus prepares His disciples for the season of shaking and pruning by focusing the disciples upon Himself and calling them to faith. The time of trouble when Jesus is the least visible is the time to trust Jesus like never before. Later, the disciples would call the early church to do the same.

Most of us will go through two to three bone-crushing events where our victory in Jesus is unseen, the promises seem

shattered, and the signs of His presence are gone. Jesus reminds us in these times, Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. The time when Jesus seems the most absent and the tempter whispers in your ear to give up, is the time to trust Him like never before. Jesus cuts to the core of faith. In the moment when the promises seem dead and Calvary comes your way, believe! Believe in the God of Jesus who raises the promise and gives life to the dead.

Question: When have you had no choice but to believe in the God of Jesus Christ? {eo}

Allen Hood (M. Div., Asbury Theological Seminary) has served on the leadership team of the International House of Prayer since 2000. He currently serves as associate director of IHOPKC and as president of International House of Prayer University. Allen is called to intercede for the fullness of God to be released in the church and to labor for the strengthening of the global prayer and missions movement. Proclaiming the glorious splendor of Christ Jesus is his joy, and preparing the bride for the glorious return of Jesus is his burden. To this end, Allen is deeply committed to seeing unceasing corporate worship and intercession established in every tribe, tongue and nation. Allen resides in Kansas City with his wife, Rachel, and their three sons.