

¹⁰Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her— ¹¹that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom. ¹²For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. ¹³As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies. Isaiah 66:10-14

There are a lot of misconceptions about Christians and Christianity out in the world. A lot of it I think is present because of the media driven age in which we live. The media it seems, in looking for extremes, since it catches people's attention, which translates into ratings for them. I think that is why we see a growing number of people who have no religious affiliation at all.

But misconceptions about the faith don't just come from non-believers; they can come from Christians themselves. For example there are some out there who believe if you are a Christian, your problems will be few. This was the great flaw of the old "power of positive thinking" crowd. While it certainly helped put a positive spin on each day, there were still things popping up that weren't so positive. I remember being at a prayer meeting some time ago when a young woman there said she had read Norman Vincent Peale's book "The Power of Positive Thinking". She spoke about it in glowing terms. Two weeks later she came back to the group asking for prayer, since she said, "I discovered it wasn't so easy staying positive

Another misconception is that if you are a Christian God will bless you with this good health and wealth. There have been over the years various preachers who have championed this idea, and sad to say, the only ones who really got wealthy were the preachers themselves.

Bowing to pressure from both those misconceptions is how Christianity speaks to the world in this media driven age. The amazing success stories of sports figures, or beauty queens who are people of faith, hold up an implicit message that if you are a person of faith, you can be like them too. Harold Bissell in a book written some years ago told the story of how he took overweight acne challenged friend when he was in high school to an evangelistic meeting whose speaker was a former "Miss America". In such situations an invitation is made for those who need to commit themselves to Christ. The girl that came with Harold Bissell whispered in his ear at that point and said "IF I accept Christ will I be a beauty queen too?"

Truthfully there are no guarantees people of faith will be immune from anything. But our faith comes in and tells us who ultimately is in charge, God who will not abandon us, a God who will have the final word, and it is a word of hope and final victory by God.

This is the background of the text from Isaiah. All the suppositions of the Israelites that they would never lose their land, (for God was their God and he would always come to the rescue,) were shattered when the Babylonians came, destroyed their nation. The final insult was to deport most of them to far off Babylon.

I am sure they felt completely abandoned, even though they probably also knew that their misfortune also had something to do with their lack of faithfulness to God. In that discouraging climate what were they to do? Interestingly enough the answer comes from the prophets. Yes, the very prophets who predicted God's judgment in the first place. In this portion of the latter part of Isaiah, God speaks loud and clear that God has not abandoned them. The imagery is very tender, and comforting. God is portrayed as a loving mother, and Israel God's child. . Ultimately they shall prosper, all with know that God is with them.

Now their ultimate return was years away, but to know their failure wasn't final, and God wouldn't abandon them must have given them something to hold on to even though their current situation was far from good.

Perhaps that's how we should live our lives of faith especially when things look bleak. We should hold on the words of scripture that tells us we belong to God. Some of the greatest hymns that have been written came when the writer was faced with a faith shattering situation. We should come to the holy table of our Lord and in the sacrament of his body and blood not only know his forgiveness, but he chose to walk the path of suffering and pain too.

So may the Christian's testimony to world not be that we are more blessed, more prosperous, or even healthier. The Christian's testimony to world should be God loves us, even when Christians fail, and circumstances are bad. If we hold on to God who is fully in charge, God will have the last word, and it will be good.

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