

Lemons or Lemonade 3

We began this series of messages two weeks regarding how we can and should deal with adversity in our own lives by studying how some biblical characters like David and Daniel handled the lemons they were served in life. We particularly considered the modern application of how David and Daniel turned lemons into lemonade, their recipe, to our personal lives today.

There are clearly two different patterns most all of us fall into when life deals us a bag of fresh picked lemons. Some of us complain, get angry, lose our faith, and/or quit and walk out on God and His church while others at least attempt to make the most out of their difficult situations. They are intent on giving God thanks and glory as Daniel did. We can all do better at handling the lemons life serves us.

Paul, it at least seems, grew up in a “charmed” life in Israel; the right family, wealth, education, and position. To have gotten into Gamaliel’s school for the privileged was probably a pretty good indication of his elite status among the Jews. It looks like he was born with lemonade being served to him on a regular basis. Let’s read some references indicating his privileged status.

³ He continued, “I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Acts 22:3 (HCSB)

⁴ “All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem. ⁵ They had previously known me for quite

some time, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I lived as a Pharisee. Acts 26:4-5 (HCSB)

If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness that is in the law, blameless. Phil 3:4-6 (HCSB)

In a purely earthly sense, Paul would have been wise to have avoided that particular road leading to Damascus and never met Jesus. Although, I'm pretty sure Jesus would have found him no matter which road he took. Of course Paul did meet Jesus on the road to Damascus and became a truly devoted follower of Christ. Everything changed, for us and the church, for the good. But for him, in the earthly sense, his world began to fall apart. It was lemons by the truckload. Listen to Paul's account of his troubles.....

But in whatever anyone dares [to boast]—I am talking foolishly—I also dare: ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I.

Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I'm talking like a madman—I'm a better one: with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, near death many times. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews 40 lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the

depths of the sea. ²⁶ On frequent journeys, [I faced] dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the open country, dangers on the sea, and dangers among false brothers; ²⁷ labor and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and lacking clothing.

²⁸ Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my care for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? ³⁰ If boasting is necessary, I will boast about my weaknesses. ³¹ The eternally blessed One, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, knows I am not lying. ³² In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me, ³³ so I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands. **2** Cor 11:21-33 (HCSB)

You may want to rethink your list of reason or excuses for being unhappy..... Paul not only refused to be pulled down, slowed down, stopped or even discouraged by all the trials, pain, suffering, rejection, threats, and disappointments, he seemed to actually “enjoy” them.

7 But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one

that is through faith in Christ —the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ [My goal] is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead. Phil 3:7-11 (HCSB)

How did he do it? He was human just like us. He had feelings. He hurt. He bled just like we do.

Paul's Recipe for Lemonade:

Be content no matter what

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me, but lacked the opportunity [to show it]. ¹¹ I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content] —whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. ¹³ I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Still, you did well by sharing with me in my hardship. Phil 4:10-14 (HCSB)

I would think especially coming from his privileged background, this was not a lesson Paul quickly or easily learned or immediately appreciated. Considering not only the loss of his wealth, power, position and even health and well-being, but even the respect and admiration of his peers. He lost it all. He

gave all that up to become an intenerate preacher with no place to even call his own. The closest thing he had to a permanent home was a Roman jail. What was the “secret of being content” that Paul found?

Possible causes of discontentment:

Sickness, loss, pain, money, job, conflict

Not getting our way

Not getting what we want

Selfishness, ego, pride

Sources of Paul’s contentment:

Complete reliance on Christ- “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Paul’s contentment was not based on his up and down, constantly varying, unpredictable earthly circumstances. Paul was able to remain content (make lemonade) regardless of his wildly varying earthly situations because his heart, mind, soul, and very life were surrendered to the will and purposes of Christ.

6 But godliness with contentment is a great gain. **7** For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. **8** But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. **1** Tim 6:6-8 (HCSB)

You will never learn to make lemonade until you learn to be content in Christ. Godliness with contentment is not about circumstances. It is about trusting the God who created you,

saved you, loves you, has a plan for you and is preparing an eternal home for you. I guess the question is, what are you putting your trust and confidence in?

Focus on eternity

I'm afraid that for so many of us so much of the time that we are so preoccupied with the here and now, the what we have and what we want, the what we don't have and what we don't want, the earthly instead of the heavenly, that any loss or setback of an earthly nature will and does set us into a tail spin.

Paul suffered more and lost more than any of us could ever imagine. How did he do it? What kept him from totally losing it? How could Paul, with all the negative, life crushing, heart breaking, energy sapping drains on his spirit, keep on living much less keep on preaching and serving. How could he have done anything but walk away say, "I quit. It's too hard!"

12 Not that I have already reached [the goal] or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. **13** Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, **14** I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. **15** Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this to you also. **Phil 3:12-15 (HCSB)**

Forgetting what is behind- not being drug down by the failures and disappointments of the past.

Reaching forward to what is ahead- Living a life of expectation of what God will do.

Pursue the prize promised by God- the prize is the eternal reward of life in heaven with Jesus. Paul wasn't so heavenly minded that he was of no earthly good, but he knew where he was going and looked forward to getting there.

21 For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. **22** Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. **23** I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ—which is far better—**24** but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. **Phil 1:21-24 (HCSB)**

Finish strong/Persevere

Paul experienced a lot of disappointments, blockades, obstacles, and threats even when his ministry was flourishing: the rejection of the Jewish Christians, whole towns refusing to even listen to his message, angry mobs trying, and nearly succeeding, to kill him, imprisonment. But it doesn't seem that any of that discouraged him. He just changed directions, shook the dust off, escaped, even got up from being stoned (not drugs/rocks) and went to another town and started preaching again. And even after he was incarcerated in Rome, being unable to visit, teach,

preach and encourage the churches, he wrote letters that became a major portion of the New Testament. He never quit.

Paul not only started out on fire, he went out in blaze of glory. Unlike Saul, David and Solomon whose later years were an embarrassment to the whole kingdom of God, Paul did not let any of the temptations, challenges, opposition, threats, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, or imprisonment dampen his spirit or squelch his passion for the lost and the church.

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing. **2**Tim 4:6-8 (HCSB)

How are you holding up? In case you hadn't noticed, sometimes life just stinks. Will your life be better described as one who made lemonade or one who just complained and cried over all the lemons? Will your Christian journey be best compared to the runner who ran his heart out but fell down a few steps from the finish line?

²⁴ Do you not know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. **1**Cor 9:25 (HCSB)

Are you running to win? Are you running at all? Do you need to pick up the pace? Or, have you even started the race? Things

may let up a bit or they could get tougher. Have you made any lemonade lately?