

February 2023 Newsletter

Thank you so much for your faithful support this month. We truly appreciate you, and the Lord will use your giving for the kingdom as we place it in His hands with faith. Here's where we are in...

Circumstances

This month we have felt that we have worked hard many times but still have problems making it. There are many people in this same situation, but we found this verse very comforting: Habakkuk 3:17-19, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the height."

In Philippians, we hear Paul in prison say to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!" I notice in Phil. 1:25 below, Paul says, "your progress and joy in the faith." We often notice that faith has perseverance, character, and hope in the suffering...but I think rarely have I attributed joy in there. It's a joy in the Lord that no matter what comes, He is with us, holds us, and takes us to the places He wants us to be! It's not a joy of receiving anything, but rather the joy of His beautiful and powerful presence by our side, in our hearts, and knowing that we are His precious possession. He is ours, and nothing can change that; nor height, nor depth, nor death, nor life, famine, trouble or hardship, angles nor demons, nor the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Phil. 1:25, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

Phil. 4:12, "I have learned to be content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength." And with this is a huge reason to rejoice, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Jesus has given us the victory if only we walk in it by faith, and this should and will fill us with joy- that nothing on earth can change His love for us in Christ Jesus!

So as it says in James 1, "consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Fundraising

Thanks to the Lord and the Lord through you, with one-time gifts and pledges as of January, we are at \$115,728.00. The cost of the two-year goal of \$105,000 has been reached. The goal is to

raise the money for a third year; each year costs \$50,067.44. (This means being launched to Peru and being able to stay there.) The percentage of the third year is thus at 21.4%

Spiritually

I was likewise encouraged by reading some of the minor Prophet books (Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah). I only say this to help explain some of the things the Lord has been teaching and comforting me through. I noticed that there is a common thread in many of the minor prophets: that because of sin, there are consequences that happen that the people have to live with until they cry out to God and repent. And those consequences are actually the Lord's discipline, for their good- to bring them back to the Lord. Take Joel, for instance. There was an invasion of locusts, a plague of locusts that were destroying and ruining all the fields, the vineyards, the wheat, the barley, etc. Then there's a call to lamentation and fasting in which Joel 2:12-13 says, "Even now," declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your heart and not your garments, return to your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." The Lord's answer in 2:18-27 is one of restoration, where the Lord brings abundant showers, and the threshing floors are filled with grain, the vats will overflow with new wine and oil...I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten- the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm- my great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.

This describes somewhat metaphorically when we sometimes blow it and lose the battle- sin gets in. The locust, unfortunately, can wreak havoc in the fields of our hearts. It's not a good feeling to be broken like this. However, even the people in Joel ultimately cried out to the Lord for deliverance, help, and restoration, and He responded with mercy, compassion, grace, and abundant love to those who were truly hurting.

Likewise, Amos has encouraged me about true repentance and that the Lord's discipline is for healing. That's one of the main things that are sometimes hard to understand, but let's look at this verse together to see and compare it with Joel.

"Go to Bethel and sin: go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings- boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign Lord. "I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered down from town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled

your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this, be prepared to meet your God." He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth-the Lord Almighty is his name." Amos even goes on to say in chapter 8, verse 22, that there will be a famine no longer of food or a thirst for water but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. That people will search all over for it and not find it. "People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it."

Comparing both Joel and Amos, we notice that famines or plagues are something used by the Lord to help his people return to Him. The same thread is seen in Jonah; a huge storm in the sea was caused because Jonah was running from the Lord, and because of this, Jonah was tossed into the sea, but it didn't end there! A whale swallowed him, and three days later, after Jonah's repentance was spat out on land again.

What I am trying to say concisely is summarized in Hebrews 12:11-13, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed." Notice in all of these passages the fruit is so important! In Joel, the harvest was eaten up and ruined: however, later, a yield. In Amos, also there was a withhold for the sake of the souls of the people, who were sinning and boasting about their "good" self-righteous offerings that ultimately mean nothing if they are not genuine. Sometimes we need to be reminded of this: "How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away." (Isaiah 64:6)

It's a good time to look at the fruit of the Spirit within us because "every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them. The remarkable thing about God is He can turn deserts into gardens with his streams of life and living water!

The prayer would be, Lord, help me to be fruitful! As it says in Phil. 1:9-11, "that your love may abound more and more in the knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ- to the glory and praise of God."

