



Anxiousness!

by Mark Brunner

Over The Top! (Psalms 118: 1-29)

Did you know that the greatest friend of joy is grief? Sounds difficult to believe? Nevertheless, God gives us grief in our lives so that we may know what joy really is. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

There is a book, "Rilla My Rilla," written as a last and closing volume in a Green Gables series. One of Rilla's brothers, Walter, struggles mightily with the decision to enlist during World War I. Walter is a different sort of boy. He questions the validity of killing anyone and is far more interested in remaining at home. He fears death more than anything and cherishes life, with all his heart. He is the dreamer when others are awash in the real. Walter is about as far from being a soldier as any young man of nineteen might be. Yet, there is a problem. Walter has a conscience and he is unable to still it. His friends goad him and persecute him labeling him as a sissy. His conscience brands him even worse as a coward. In the end Walter makes the most momentous decision of his life; he decides to enlist and put both the taunting of his friends and the burning of his conscience to rest. Walter goes off to war, a war fought in endless muddy, rat-infested trenches; a war that had lingered on for years. Walter, the poet and lover, is plunked down in the mud of Belgium where he at

last puts his conscience to rest and leaves behind the taunts of his friends. Walter becomes a soldier.

Then, after only a few months slogging it out in the trenches, Walter's battalion is called upon to take a ridge heavily fortified and occupied by the enemy. As the fateful morning comes and the officer's whistle signals the "at arms", scores of Canadian boys leap over the top of their trenches and rush upon the enemy. Casualties are severe, yet the rush has been successful. The enemy was pushed off the ridge. Walter never made it to the ridge, however. Just as the advance began he turned around to encourage his comrades, to urge them on despite their fears of death. Walter is shot in the back and is killed instantly. His commanding officer, wrote, "He was the bravest of the brave, an example for all those who fight for what is right and just." Walter the "coward" passed from this life going in the opposite direction.

"I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation." I guess I prefer the old translation of this, "I give thanks unto thee for thou has chastened me sore, and art become my salvation." (KJV) What a "joyful" verse as Luther calls it. Here's a verse to hang your hat on if ever there was one. He who gives us grief, is also the giver of joy. He who punishes us, is inclined to lift us up. He who makes us poor and weak, is also busy making us rich and powerful. He who allows us to be afraid, has had a plan all along to make us full of courage. God is a god of grace who loves each of us so much that He ordains pleasure in pain and gain in loss. This is the merit of His grace and the power of it. He anoints us with that grace and sends us over the top of life's trenches even when it appears we don't have what it takes to "take our objective." Yet, because of His grace, he wills us to do so. Give thanks to the Lord for He is truly good!

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

Bin That Never Empties! (1 Timothy 4: 11-16)

Most things we seek in life eventually leave us or disappear. It is the nature of things. There is one thing, however, that is always with us, the same today as yesterday. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

One of my favorite stories from the Old Testament is the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. The Lord came to Elijah and told him to go to the town of Zarephath to the house of a widow. There he would find food and drink. Reaching the town he asked her for food and drink. She responds by telling him that all she has left is enough flour to bake a loaf of bread for herself and her son, a final meal. Elijah assures her that “The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.” Skeptical, the widow complies and prepares a meal for the prophet. Elijah, the widow and her son are fed on a promise--that the bin would remain bottomless.

I like this story not only because it appeals to my faith, it also appeals to my curiosity. What must it have been like to wake up each morning, peer into the bin and see it always full. Each bite of the miraculous food must have seemed like you were eating a miracle. How remarkable it would be to transfer such bounty from the widow and her son to my life. Wouldn't it be great to be able to “go to the bin” daily and pull out just enough cash to pay the bills? Wouldn't it be great to have some never-ending source of anything? Face it, there probably isn't anyone who wouldn't love to have a bin like that. It would mean that we could spend more of our time playing and less working. Life would just plain be more predictable. Instead of worrying about things and wondering when something good might happen, we would be better able to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Is there anything wrong with wanting such a thing? Besides, what makes the widow any more special than you or I? If God did it for her and her son, why would He not be willing to do it for us?

Was the widow's bin such a miracle like the parting of the Red Sea that God chose never to repeat it again? Or, was it a demonstration of something that each of us shares in every day? Think about it. Every day you can wake up to an end- less supply of something that is more satisfying than food, and more

edifying than any other treasure you could think of. It is the never-ending and regenerating power of God's Word in our lives. As temptations never cease and hardships always stalk us, we can go to the bin of God's Word, open the lid and discover that it is the same as yesterday and will be the same tomorrow. It can never be exhausted for you can read it, but you will never be satisfied by it unless you return to it again. It is the power that anoints our faith and sets us apart from those who don't know Jesus Christ. We never lose our ability to learn from it or to be blessed by it. The widow's bin really symbolizes the satisfying Word that can never be depleted or finished for it will always be there to satisfy. We just need to open the lid.

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A Six Pack Faith! (09-23-15-Anxiety! Philippians 1: 1-6)

Did you know that sometimes the bad things in life can actually make us good? When it comes to temptations, God often uses the bad to foster the good. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

"Dad, why do we need temptations?" I had just finished correcting one of my children for something they had done wrong. She had yielded to a temptation and discovered how wrong the action had turned out to be. Not only had she made a poor choice when there were other choices to make, she had yielded to a temptation that brought along with it consequences. The deed was done and the tears had dried. Now there was only tomorrow to look to and the prospect was somewhat bleak. Emotions were running high as my daughter looked up to me and asked, "Dad, you always say that all things work together for good for them that love God. Just how is this supposed to be good in my life. I can't see it. I can only see how a whole bunch of bad things are going to happen, not good things."

Why do we need temptation? That's a good question. Wouldn't life be a whole lot simpler without them?

I took my child by the hand and led her down into the basement; a place for punishment if there ever was one; especially in the eyes of a young lady who was a bit afraid of the dark to begin with. I walked over to the ceiling light and pulled the cord. The light illumined an array of foreboding equipment. I sat my daughter down on the bench and asked her this question. “Why do I put myself through this Monday through Friday every week out of the year? Why would anyone want to push and pull these weights up and down until his muscles began to ache?” She looked at me and thoughtfully smiled. “I thought it was because you liked doing it.” I shook my head and laughed. “No. I do this because it helps me stay physically fit and healthier. I do it for you and for the entire family. If I stay healthy, it benefits everyone.”

She looked at me and frowned. “So, what has this got to do with temptation? Are you tempted to quit or something?” “Sure I am tempted to quit often. The reason I strive to do this is so that I stay fit enough to avoid the temptation the next time my body tells me it’s of little point to exercise today! “This stuff makes me stronger every time I use it. The temptation to quit is always with me. But each time I use this stuff, I grow stronger in my ability to resist.” Suddenly a light went on in her eyes. “You mean each temptation makes me stronger? “Yes! God uses temptations to build us up, not tear us down. The little ones make us stronger until we can resist the really big ones. She seemed puzzled again for a moment and then with a smile blurted out. “You mean if you go through this stuff enough it’s like getting a “six-pack” faith?” “Sure, you could call faith that can withstand the devil’s blows because it’s rock solid a “six-pack” faith.” “Good!” she proclaimed. “I think I want to get me one of those!” “And so you will sweetheart.” I replied–“So you will!”

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A Charles Atlas Heart! (Proverbs 3: 21-28)

Do you believe in the impossible? Lose 30 pounds in 30 days? Get ripped with just this piece of equipment? Too good to be true? Only for some things. My friend, life’s a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Remember those little ads in the back of magazines like Popular Science and Sports Illustrated that cater to a man's (boy's) ego. I remember reading these as a boy and, actually, replying to one every now and then. You know—the little ads that advertise strength like Charles Atlas overnight if you just buy into this program for becoming physically fit or that piece of conditioning equipment that is “guaranteed” to build muscles in only “90 days or your money back.” Most of us read these ads but find them only amusing. How can any one believe them and be taken by them. We know deep in our hearts that no such thing will happen if we buy into the ad's promises. Getting a “six-pack” set of abs is more than just a matter of program or device. Enough young men have been lured by the claims of instant manhood that they have, good sense overcome, yielded to the temptation that perhaps, just perhaps, there is an outside chance that the claims might have at least some validity.

As uncertain as we might be about some things that are at best dubious in their claims, vanity and worldliness often get the better of us and we fall into the trap of trying to get things the easy way. Perhaps it is because we simply want to underpin our uncertainty (become more certain about being certain about things); so we investigate and test-drive just so we know that we were right in the first place. “All things really do come to them that wait” and “there is no free lunch.”

What about our faith? God makes some pretty incredible claims when it comes to having and using a faith-life. He tells us that by faith we can move mountains.

Sounds a bit like a Charles Atlas ad? Yes, on the one hand, it is. The claims that God makes for our faith are pretty fantastic. On the surface they seem incredible, even not to be believed. On the other hand, the claims that God makes about our faith are perfectly plausible, even logical, when viewed in the light of His Word. God tells us that through baptism and our belief in His Word, He will grant us His own, personal Holy Spirit. It's just like God dwelling right inside of our hearts. Think about it! The mightiest force in all of the universe, God, dwelling right within our hearts! Are you getting a picture of Charles Atlas? How can any heart so anointed not be the picture of colossal strength and power? Why even death, the greatest enemy we know on this earth, bows down before the Charles Atlas of the Universe, the Lord God

Almighty! And, to think of Him dwelling within us? Wow! There's an "ad" that's not only incredible to believe but impossible to pass up. There's "power" that we simply can't afford to pass up. Here's a claim you can be totally certain of. If you respond to this "ad," you won't be needing a refund. "Write today! Don't let this one get away!"

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Horse Of A Different Color! (Ephesians 3: 13-21)

Take out an egg in the morning to make breakfast, you probably just pick one, though one might have one yolk and another two? What is hidden makes a difference. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Years ago I attended a horse and rider competition at our county fair. As the loudspeaker blared to announce the event to the group of riders and horses assembled outside the ring, each young rider climbed onto his or her mount and gently led them into the arena. Although there were both young girls and boys astride their mounts and the horses represented a wide variety of breeds, the expectation as they slowly cantered around the ring in preparation for the orchestrated exercise to follow was uniform. I was sure that each rider would be able to perform well and although there would be the inevitable distinction between blue, red and white ribbon performances, those differences would be subtle and known principally only to the two judges situated in the center of the arena. But all that changed in a moment. While there were four riders in the ring and four horses, there was one in particular that caught even my untrained eye. The rider seemed utterly in control as the smile on her face stayed put the entire time. When a command came over the speaker, she simply kicked once, clicked to the horse and the command was obeyed. This horse held its head higher and just seemed more stately and disciplined. There was no doubt in my mind that this would be the blue ribbon performance. As the horse and riders

lined up in the middle of the ring to receive their ratings, although each horse hoofed the ground here and there, shook a mane or pranced a bit, this horse did so with class. And, sure enough, it was the blue ribbon winner.

Worldly people and people of faith are like those horses and riders. We share a lot of things on the surface. We lose patience with things and people. We cry when we get hurt and become sad when things don't go our way. Yet, because we are people of faith, there is and should be a bearing about us that distinguishes us from the people of the world. What is this thing that separates us, delineates who we are and breaks us apart from the "rest of the herd?" It can be and is only one thing, the Holy Spirit of God. While the world can be strong and courageous, it can never match the strength and courage given to Christians through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It just shows. We like others submit to temptation, we fall, but are pulled out again by the Holy Spirit. When the world fears death and destruction, the Christian, by the Holy Spirit, is able to see past it and envision the loving arms of a Gracious God. Where the world may have some strength, the Christian has spiritual strength. It makes us bold and daring, willing to take a stand for what is right and against what is wrong. Spiritual strength marks us as winners, set apart from the ranks of the lost. We are different from the rest even though on the surface we all look the same. What sets us apart is our ability to trust beyond logic, serve without reward, and love without expectation. In the world that would truly make us a "horse of a different color!"

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