

"The Necessity Of Burdens"

Dr. Thomas Lambie was an American-born missionary medical doctor noteworthy for becoming the first American missionary in Ethiopia, and for his devotion to Christ. During his first term in Ethiopia, he learned a valuable lesson that would impact his life and service as a missionary until the day he died. Near one of the villages was a swift and bridgeless stream that was barely knee-deep. He observed that before the natives crossed the stream, they would find a large, heavy stone and lift it to their shoulder carrying it across the stream as a ballast. Curious as to this odd behavior, Dr. Lambie asked a villager to explain the rationale. The villager explained that while the water appeared shallow, the current was very swift beneath the surface. This created a danger of being swept off one's feet and carried down the stream to greater depths or hurled to death against the hidden rocks. The extra weight of the stone was necessary to keep their feet solid on the bed of the stream to enable them to cross safely without being swept away.

It seems that there are seasons in life in which we find ourselves carrying a weight that is not only cumbersome to grip, but rather burdensome to bear. Sometimes they may be financial burdens, spiritual burdens, or even the burden of grief and sorrow. With such burdens others can supply their support and share the load of the burdens. However, burdens become different when they are physical infirmities, responsibilities of life, or facing the doorway of death. Paul seemed to understand this difference when he wrote in Galatians 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens...", but went on to write in verse 5, "For every man shall bear his own burden." In verse 2, the word "burden" is describing a heavy load that places great demand upon one's resources. But, in verse 5, the word "burden" is describing a soldier's backpack. Like a child in a mother's womb, there are some things in life that are impossible to share and must be carried alone. Joseph was asked to bear the public scorn of a virgin birth. Paul was asked to bear a thorn in his flesh. Simon the Cyrenian was asked to bear a cross. Jesus was asked to bear the sins of the world! There is a Yiddish Proverb that says, "God gives burdens, also shoulders." Consider with me why burdens are not just a reality, but they are a necessity in a life that is growing and maturing in the Lord.

Burdens are necessary to inspire our supplication. In Numbers 11:11, when the children of Israel complained about the manna God was providing daily, Moses asked God why He had placed "the burden of all this people upon me?" Burdens will induce some interesting reactions in life. When the weight comes crashing down, we will either panic, pout, protest, or pray. Evangelist Ron Dunn used to say, "Anything that causes you to pray is a blessing to your life." He was right! A man who never prays is a man out of touch with the supernatural and is merely aimless in his existence. If Abraham had never prayed amidst his burden would Lot have perished with Sodom? If Hannah had never prayed amidst her burden would she have remained barren? If Hezekiah had never prayed amidst his burden would he have been given extra years of life? In Psalm 55:22, when David wrote, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord...", he was saying, "Roll off the responsibility of living onto the Lord."

The result is guaranteed; "...and He shall sustain thee." Burdens are never meant to drive us into the ground, but rather are meant to drive us to the heart of the One that measures each grain of the burden with purpose.

Burdens are necessary to improve our stability. In Matthew 11:29-30, Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you...for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Again, the word "burden" here refers to a soldier's backpack. The Lord is reminding us that He never puts a load upon us that is unproductive and causes us to lose our balance. If you have ever watched a tightrope walker in the circus, you will notice he carries a long, weighted balancing pole as he passes overhead. Rather than disadvantaging him, the weight of the pole actually presses his feet onto the rope and stabilizes his equilibrium with poise. Spiritual poise is the byproduct of successful repetitions beneath a burden. The repeated burden of rejection shaped Joseph with an accepted poise in the time of famine. The burden of forty continual years of bleating sheep seasoned Moses with a graceful poise during his forty years of murmuring people. The burden of reoccurring threats in the sheep fields matured David with a confident poise when he heard the taunts of Goliath. I love what Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel once said, "Faith like Job's cannot be shaken because it is the result of having been shaken." Until a man learns how to take a blow and keep on standing he will never produce a steady walk of faith.

Burdens are necessary to increase our stamina. In Nehemiah 4:10, at the halfway point of rebuilding the wall, the task became so overwhelming that Judah said, "...the strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed...so that we are not able to build the wall." However, like a man who has just finished working out with weights, they may have "felt" weaker but in reality they were growing stronger. They kept on carrying and passing brick after brick until "...the wall was finished." Noted nineteenth century minister Phillips Brooks said, "Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks." The great secret to bearing burdens is learning how to exchange our weakness for the strength of the Lord. This exchange caused Isaiah to say under his burden, "But they that wait upon the Lord...shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." In the Lord's strength, you can carry more than you ever thought you could carry, and you can walk further than you ever thought you could walk. Like a track athlete who removes his cumbersome ankle weights after practice, the weight of burdens are mere preparation for the graceful strides we will take in eternity.

When sheep approach a stream in which they are fearful to cross, the shepherd uses an interesting tactic. He will take a young lamb from the flock and personally carry it to the other side of the stream. Now separated, the young lamb begins to cry with heartfelt bleats. Older sheep will then eagerly cross over because their fears have been overshadowed by the burden of their heart. Burdens have an unusual way of motivating us to go and to do what we otherwise would never attempt. Those who have gone on to achieve God-sized tasks were often those who also carried God-sized burdens. To forsake a burden simply because you fear the weight is to face a certain

undertow for which you will be no match.

Your Most Proud Pastor,
© 2009 Alan Stewart