

Bitter or Better?

Bitterness is a reckless driver. Christians need to see its peril. It grieves the Holy Spirit, not because of what happened *to us* to make us bitter, but rather, what's happening *with us* in our bitterness. (Eph. 4:30-31)

Biblically, if we were to put a face on bitterness, it would be Jezebel. After this queen's land, according to Elijah's prophecy, was stricken by a 3½ year drought, and her 450 prophets of Baal were embarrassed and executed by the command of Elijah, she was bitter! She sent a messenger to Elijah saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." (1st Kings 19:2) Jezebel was endlessly consumed and murderous. Bitterness got Jezebel.

Refreshingly, the face of *conquered* bitterness would be Joseph. We would think being sold by his brothers would make him bitter. We would think two years in prison as an innocent man would make him bitter. Not Joseph. He did not let his hateful family trap him in bitterness. He did not become dispirited or psychologically tainted. Certainly Joseph was devastated by his brothers actions, and troubled by Egyptian imprisonment. Even his brothers expected his bitterness to still be intact two decades later. But, happily they were wrong! How did Joseph overcome bitterness? He rose above it with love and hope. He loved his brothers and he trusted God's promises. As his brothers feared for their lives in Joseph's presence, he comforted them, "Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." (Gen. 45:5-7). Joseph was *better*, not *bitter*!

In the New Testament, Christians are warned of the dangers of bitterness. It's bad fruit and it keeps bad company. Look at these verses.

- *Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*" (Col 3:19). Bitterness takes fault-finding to the point of no return. It destroys relationships, including marriage.
- *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.*" (Heb. 12:15). Bitterness derails us.
- *"But if ye have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic."* (James 3:14-15). Bitterness is an earthly dead end.
- *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."* (Eph. 4:30-31). Bitterness works against God.

We can get over bitterness. It's not easy, but here's how.

- Have the heart of a little child. (Matt. 19:1-6) Little children don't carry bitterness, not even sarcasm. We need the same humbleness in Christ's kingdom.
- Love others. Yes, It hurts when others inflict pain or deceit. However, both Jesus and Stephen prayed for their murders (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). They loved their enemies, even in the face of cruelty.
- Focus on God and his word to find power and higher purposes in life. Ask God, "Give me a fruitful diversion", and pray, "deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13). Rise above bitterness!

Bitterness opposes Christ, and it defeats us. Let's get *better* rather than *bitter*; through faith, hope and joy in Jesus Christ.

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