

Weekly Encouragement

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Your Disgrace is Removed

By Rev. Peter Eng



Photo courtesy of Thundafunda

"In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." (Luke 1:25).

Should public opinion affect us?

If you regard yourself as spiritually confident, you may most likely seek God's approval, and even disdain human opinion. Yet with startling candor, Elizabeth bursts out in thanksgiving that God has taken away her disgrace, when she became pregnant with John (the Baptist). Zechariah prayed for the redemption of the nation of Israel and God answered with the gift of a son for him and Elizabeth. Elizabeth embraced that personal gift with a passion. Her greatest pleasure in her son was not that he would be part of God's redemptive

plan, but that her pregnancy has removed her disgrace among her people.

God has made us social creatures. What others think about us matters to us. Elizabeth lived during a time when a childless woman is seen as barren on account of a spiritual defect. Elizabeth characterized her condition as being in spiritual disgrace. She was a spiritual underclass.

Elizabeth was defined by her insufficiency. Society tends to do that to people. "He is an ex-con. She is an ex-addict. He is an ex-alcoholic." Christians are no better in this regard. Like the rest of the world, we identify, and invariably define, people by their failures or insufficiencies. In fact, we may do worse. We create a spiritual underclass and victimize the Elizabeths of our day.

Perhaps you are an Elizabeth. Perhaps you are the spiritual underclass in a Christian community. This message is clearly for you. You can look forward to the day when you say with Elizabeth, "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." Your day will come. And you will give God the glory.

When we suffer rejection, it is easy to leave the community that rejects us for one that accepts us. One example is an unwed mother. Her mistake that

produced the condition is a past she cannot undo. In her condition, she is jilted by her lover. And if the church also rejects her, she suffers a second disappointment. Suddenly a world without moral restraints looks inviting. Our harshness is not discipline, it serves only to drive her away from God. But if the church would treat her tenderly and nurture her hurt, she can find healing and wholeness again.

Some modern day Pharisee will say, "If we don't punish her, others will not learn." Another will chime in, "We must be responsible and put her through church discipline." Surely there is a place for discipline for an unrepentant sinner. But for one caught in a sin and lives with the effects of it, regret and repentance are almost natural. Restoration through healing is the first order of the day. But there is a great evil in our midst: the rejection of those who should be restored.

From shame to glory

Jesus challenged and reversed shame and glory. In life, Jesus reached out to those too poor for the niceties of ceremonial cleanness. Jesus touched the unclean, the sick, and even the leper that they may become clean. Jesus reversed the Old Testament concept of staying away from the unclean to remain clean. Jesus the clean, touched the unclean to make them clean. Jesus welcomed tax-collectors risking his own popularity. In death, he transformed the cross from an instrument of despair, death and shame into hope, life and glory.

Jesus was not yet born when Elizabeth rejoiced in the removal of her disgrace. But her exultation was prescient. Her Messiah wants to turn our shame to glory. Messiah is only expressing God's heart.

Jesus has come to remove our sin. But he also removes our disgrace. Our hope in Christ is that at a time of his own choosing, he will remove our disgrace. One day, we will no longer be defined by our failure or insufficiency, but by the grace of God. Perhaps today is the day God will deliver you from shame and take away your disgrace.

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.