

Proverbs 15 (15) – Look on the Bright Side

All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.

This verse is a proverb, which means it is a wise saying. Generally speaking, proverbs tell you how life is, how things work in the world. Proverbs help you see life more clearly. But they are not promises. They don't present every possible scenario. Still, proverbs are given by God, they are written for our learning, and we need to find out what this proverb really means.

You might look at the proverb and think it's actually very simple. When someone has it bad, everything seems like it's going to go bad. Trouble has found you, and now trouble is all you ever seem to find. And when you look at the other part of this proverb, it seems to be saying that when you feel good, it can seem like everything is always turning out good. Favor has found you, and now everything seems favorable.

Of course, nobody has it all good all of the time. And nobody has it all bad all of the time. That won't happen till heaven and hell. But it sure can feel like heaven on earth or hell on earth at times. Things can color your whole world. When bad things happen, it can make you feel like you're living your whole life in your sad place. And when good things happen, it can make you feel like you're living your whole life in your happy place.

Maybe you've been in a season where it just seems like you're a bad and sad magnet. Or maybe you've known times where it seems like you're a blessed and happy magnet. Maybe you think that this proverb points to the haves and have nots in this world. Some people are happy, and some people are sad. Some have it good, and some have it bad. And you want to get to the happy place, and stay in the happy place, and get away from the sad place and stay away from the sad place. And so does everybody else. And people pay a lot of money to other people who seem to have found a way to do just that. Again and again, someone is getting rich and famous selling their idea of how to get to the happy place and stay out of the sad place.

That's just the way life is. And it's how most people understand this, and what most people agree with, and how most self-help promoters, including those in the professing Christian church, teach this. Some people have a positive attitude and some people have a negative attitude. So, if you just cultivate a positive mental attitude, then things will go better for you.

Let me ask you something. Haven't you heard that positive mental attitude message in places other than the church? And even when you have heard it in the church, where is the Christianity in that? I'm not saying that you shouldn't care about having a positive attitude. You should. It is important. The Bible does teach that, including in this proverb. But is that all there is to it? Is there nothing else for Christians that makes their experience more grounded than just a positive mental attitude? All by itself, is there a distinctly Christian message in the positive mental attitude message? No, there isn't. You can have a positive mental attitude without Jesus. But let me tell you Christian, you don't want to. Christians have something more than that. Christians have a deeper ground. If you can preach and teach a message that would be the same anywhere else, that no one else would disagree with, that does not promote Jesus as the only way, where is the gospel in that? Where is Christ in that? Where is the glory of God in that?

This is a Christian church, and I am a gospel minister. Our mission is to give the good news of Christ and his gospel to the glory of God. If positive mental attitude is all there is to this proverb, then why does God include it in the Bible? It doesn't sound like any deep insight. It just sounds like common sense. Of course, we should thank God for the common grace that gives us common sense. We find it in the Bible. But this proverb gives us more than common grace; it points us to special grace, saving grace, standing grace. There is much more than meets the eye here. We have something much more powerful than mere positive mental attitude. We have Jesus. And today, we will see how Jesus makes what is written here come alive.

So, let's dive deeper and find what God has for us in this precious and powerful proverb. I pray that God opens the eyes of your heart.

Proverbs 15:15 is not a comparison between suffering and success. It is about how you perceive your circumstances. There is a godly perception and a gloomy perception. Bad things and good things happen to all of us. But how we think about those things, our perspective of those things, how we process those things, how we react and respond to those things is different, and it involves our choices, our training, and our faith. Life can seem like one obstacle after another. Or it can seem like one opportunity after another. It's not about never being sad; it's about what you do when you're sad. It's not about nothing bad ever happening to you. It's about what you do when something bad happens to you. It's not about never being broken. It's about your attitude when you are broken. I saw a sign that asked, what works better when it's broken? The answer was a horse. And I thought, that's right. An unbroken horse never wins a race. It's never even in the race. And then I thought about that some more. What works better when it's broken? A Christian. Then they can run the race in faith, depending on God, desiring his glory. And winning a great reward.

The word "evil" here can mean something bad that you did. But other times it means something bad happening to you. And this second sense, of evil being bad things happening to you, is what this proverb is talking about. However, the word "afflicted" here is not referring to outward circumstances, but to a gloomy attitude. In other words, this person is not simply feeling bad because they have been afflicted from the outside. They are feeling bad because they are afflicting themselves on the inside.

If all you ever have is a bad attitude, it will seem like all you ever have is bad days. And again, listen carefully. This isn't a person who has it bad on the outside, so they feel bad on the inside, too. This is a person who is making themselves feel bad on the inside, so everything on the outside seems bad, too. It's not that what's happening on the outside is making them sad on the inside. It's that they are sad on the inside so they only see bad on the outside. The first part of this proverb is describing someone who might or might not have a lot of misery to deal with. But they continually afflict themselves, and so, every day, and all of life, seems like it is afflicting them with evil.

The contrast to this type of person is the one whose heart attitude is full of joy. And so, they keep finding banquets to feast on. They may have great adversity, but they are able to look on the bright side. They aren't denying bad things, they are directing their heart to good things even when they have to deal with bad things. Romans 12:15 says – *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* So, every Christian needs to learn this. And if you want to preach or teach the word of God, you had better learn this, or this will learn you. When you're in your happy place, everything smells like roses. When you're in your sad place, everything feels like thorns. You can feel like you're being buried. Or like you're being planted. Like everything is falling apart. Or like everything is coming together. Like Romans 8:28 doesn't apply to you. Or like it does. The choice is yours. You don't have to deny your feelings. You have to direct them. To Jesus.

When your mind is miserable, all you find is misery. When your attitude is awful, all you find is adversity. It's not about never being sad it's about what you do when you're sad. And that is about what you've done before you got sad. Pain and suffering are coming, if not for you, then for someone you love. So, it still affects you. And this proverb is not telling you to deny your reality. It is telling you to direct your heart. It isn't fun to be attacked from the outside. But it is worse to attack yourself on the inside. Isaiah 26:3 says – *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.* Preach to yourself every day, not just when the bad times come.

Now you might be saying, wait a minute. I thought you were saying that this proverb, that this message, is about more than mere positivity. I thought you said that our Christian experience should be grounded in more than a mere positive mental attitude. Yes, I did, and yes, we must. So now, let me show you the ultimate difference, the ultimate example, and the ultimate solution. Of course, it is Jesus Christ, and we see him afflicted on the cross in Isaiah 53. What does he do? And what is he teaching us to do? And what has he done for us that we cannot do for ourselves? And how does that help us to have faith when we are afflicted, and even when we are afflicting ourselves? Once again, I pray that God opens the eyes of your heart.

Isaiah 53:4 says – *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.* You see, Jesus was afflicted, but not for his own sins. But for ours, for mine, for yours. And he was bearing the affliction we deserved. As Isaiah 53:6 says – *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Yes, as Isaiah 53:4 says, Jesus was bearing our griefs and he was carrying our sorrows, and he was stricken, and smitten by God. *But, as Isaiah 53:5 says, he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.* Jesus paid for your affliction by being afflicted. He was afflicted on the outside. But he was not afflicted on the inside. Jesus was suffering great evil. But he saw something more than the evil. He could see in the dark. Because in his heart was the light.

What Jesus suffered on the cross was beyond any horror you could possibly imagine. God the Father was punishing God the Son in your place. Isaiah 53:10 says *it was the will of the LORD to crush him.* But this was for a purpose, for a people, for you. Isaiah 53:10 goes on to say that when God has put Jesus to grief; *when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring.* And Isaiah 53:11 then says this – *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* Hallelujah!

You see, Jesus was afflicted from without. But he did not afflict himself from within. Isaiah 53:3 says – *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* But Isaiah 45:7 says that Jesus was *anointed with the oil of gladness* beyond anyone else. Even when he said, *My God, my God why have you forsaken me,* it was for our sake, he was suffering our pain. And he was pointing to the whole of Psalm 22, which starts in sorrow but ends in triumph. Jesus was not afflicted as in having a bad attitude about it. Isaiah 53:7 says that *he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.* In fact, in Hebrews 12:2 it says *for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.* Jesus endured more pain and sorrow than anyone in history ever did. More than anyone in history ever could. And actually, what Jesus endured,

for his people, was all of the pain and sorrow there ever was! All of the punishment for sin. All of the pain of abandonment. All of the affliction. So that his people would know eternal life, eternal joy, eternal peace, eternal love. Jesus took all the punishment that we deserved, to give us all the reward that he deserved.

Oh, how hard life can be. And how hard we can be on ourselves. Sometimes it seems like life is just too hard, that it's too much work, that it will never get any better, that everything is going wrong, that no one wants to help me get it right, that everything is messed up, and I seem to mess everything up. But you can still have joy, you can still find a feast, in the praise and worship of Jesus Christ. And the first words of his famous Sermon on the Mount were this – *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

You don't have to deny your reality, you can transcend it. You can be transformed through it. And you don't have to deny your feelings, you just have to direct them. Look on the bright side. Even when you're overcome, overwhelmed, over worked, over stressed, and overly sad, you can rely on more than a mere positive mental attitude. You can rely on Jesus. He has felt your pain, and he can help you now. How? Ask him to open the eyes of your heart, like the Apostle Paul prayed for in Ephesians 1:18-19 – *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.*

Bad things happen. And people mourn. And that is not wrong. But that is not all. Isaiah 61:3 says that Jesus the Messiah came *to grant to those who mourn...beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.* Don't see Jesus through the lens of life. See life through the lens of Jesus. And then you'll be able to see his light in the dark. And you can find his way in this dark world. And you'll find joy even when things are bad and sad. And you'll find yourself in the kingdom of heaven forever.