

Preacher's Pen points

Faith's response to Bad News



Most of you know by now that Martha has been recently diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Already we have been blessed by your loving concern and generosity; and we thank you for it. We realize that our experiences are not unique and that others all over the world face similar problems daily. Many of you have had to face serious health issues and have inspired us by your faith and courage. Perhaps it is a good time to revisit the age-old question, "How does a faithful person respond to bad news?" As I ponder this question for Martha and me I hope it will also be helpful to others who face similar circumstances from time to time. There are five things we must always remember in the face of life's challenges.

Our lives are always in God's hands.

For all of us, life's threatening events make us powerfully aware of this truth. But even when life is routine and ordinary it is still true. As the Preacher wrote, "...righteous men, wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God" (Eccl. 9:1). There is great assurance and comfort in that. He is in control!

God always loves us.

God's love is just as real and strong in adversity as it is in prosperity. Our circumstances are not a measure of God's love. Instead, the measure of God's love is the cross (Rom. 5:6-8). In it He proved forever how much He loves each of us. The knowledge of this love is a great encouragement in life's trials.

Our ultimate priority of our life should always be to glorify God.

Our attitude should be the same as Paul when contemplating an uncertain future. He had one single purpose—that "*Christ shall even now, as always, be*

exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." (Phil. 1:20). All of us should live our lives with that goal constantly in view. Bad news should not precipitate a major change in the direction of our lives, if our goal has always been to serve God. We will just keep on doing what God has called us to do!

Our earthly future is always uncertain.

When confronted with bad news we are made keenly aware of the uncertainty of life. But the truth is, none of us knows from day to day what we will face. As James said, "...you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow" (Jas. 4:14). That's why we always need to be ready to face God in judgment.

Our heavenly hope is always sure and steadfast.

Here is the one constant in our existence. For all that we don't know in this life, there are those eternal truths we embrace in faith and which buoy us in life's storms. Because God has promised, they even take the form, not of "we believe" but rather "we know". "*We know that we have a building not made with hands eternal in the heavens*" (2 Cor. 5:1). "*We know that when He appears we shall be like him; for we shall see him just as He is*" (1 Jn. 3:2). This hope "*we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*" (Heb. 6:19)

These principles I trust will guide Martha and me in what we hope will be a successful treatment and cure. We hope at the same time that we can be an example of faith to you just as so many of you have been to us! And we hope that in your trials these principles will comfort you!

—Johnny