

Monday, April 27, 2020

“If only . . .” How many times have you thought or spoken those two little words? They’re words that express regret or remorse, even shame, about something in the past.

“If only I had said, ‘no.’” “If only I had said, ‘yes.’”

“If only I had been wiser with my money.”

“If only I had thought about the consequences of what I said before I said it.”

“If only I had spent more time with my children.”

“If only I had studied harder, taken school more seriously, taken better care of my body, chosen a different vocation, forgiven the person who hurt me, listened to the advice of trusted friends, never started this bad habit, shown grace instead of judgment . . .” You can add your own personal scenario.

Even Jesus was accused of an “if only.” *Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died (John 11:21).* Trying to “guilt” Jesus is never a good idea.

Yet, imagine how life would be different if the “if only’s” evaporated from our lives.

We all have legitimate regrets for past events/circumstances that have negatively influenced who we are and how we view life. It’s realistic to regret ways we’ve harmed or been harmed by others. And it certainly is appropriate to feel some “if only’s” that are a consequence of sin in the world (e.g., “If only there wasn’t so much suffering in the world.”)

Unfortunately, most of our “if only’s” center on situations that drain our hope, deplete our joy, and sabotage our peace. They lead us into a desert of discouragement and despair.

And when we settle in places of hopelessness, the regrets divert our focus away from trusting the promises of God – the foundation and power of our future hope – to falling prey to our regrets. Discouragement and despair set in because we feel trapped by regrets we can’t seem to change.

So, I offer you a two-word solution to the curse of damaging regret: *But God . . .*

Ephesians 2:4-7 *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

In Christ you are not condemned by any “if only” regret – true or false, valid or invalid, past or present. All of your “if only’s” will find their end in God, who is *rich in mercy* and gifts you with *immeasurable riches of his grace*.

So, if your regrets are weighing you down, examine them. What’s giving them life? Once you’ve identified that, turn them over to God, and then *look to Jesus the founder and perfecter of your faith* (Hebrews 12:2).

Remember: *But God*. Let Him work in and through the regrets of your past for His glory, and for your benefit and blessing.

In response to Martha’s “if only”, Jesus said, *I AM the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.*

Bring your “if only’s” to the great I AM. He brings life out of the death sentence of regret, remorse, and shame.

*But God* . . . Memorize those two words – and destroy your “if only’s” with them.