

Encouragement

Introduction. In 1 Samuel 30:1-6, David found himself in a particularly distressing situation. The Amalekites had destroyed the city of Ziklag and taken its inhabitants captive. On top of that, the people were greatly embittered against him because of his handling of the situation. To say the least, David was discouraged, but the end of the account tells us that he strengthened himself in the Lord.

Let me ask a few questions to demonstrate that we need encouragement. Do you have a job that is far from pleasant? Have you lost your job or about to lose your job? Are you having bad financial problems? Are you grieving over the death of a loved one which has given you that empty, lonely feeling? Do you have a son or daughter that needs help? Are you suffering from a debilitating disease? Are you suffering from the ache, pains, and loneliness of old age? Have you been sorely disappointed in someone you trusted? Are you disappointed with yourself, suffering under the burden of guilt? Is your marriage far from what it ought to be? Have you been through the pains of a divorce? Have you been through the pain of your parents getting a divorce? Has one or more of your children greatly disappointed you? Have your parents greatly disappointed you? Are you discouraged by the way you have been treated by some brother or sister? Are you suffering because a family member, or friend has an addiction problem? Are you discouraged because you are not the kind of Christian you should be? Do you feel that you are not appreciated by your family, or your brethren? Disappointment lurks around every corner, so here are three exceptional reasons why we can take courage.

I. We Take Courage Because We Have God's Revelation

A. Isaiah 40:28-31.

1. All humans have their weakness, but God's power and strength never diminishes.
 - a) He is never too tired or busy to listen. He is the source of our strength.
 - b) When you feel all of life crushing you and you cannot go another step, remember you can call on God and renew your strength. David's prayers in the Psalms are tremendous examples of this (18:6; 27:4-5; 34:4-7).
2. When we wait on the Lord, we patiently rely on Him to give us strength. Our God is certainly able to provide (Ephesians 3:20-21).

B. Psalm 23:1-6.

1. The Psalms inspire, comfort, and encourage us just when we need a word from the Lord. The imagery in this psalm is a flock of sheep, gently and harmlessly, feeding in fertile pastures, under the care of a skillful, watchful, and tender shepherd, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.
2. The consolations of the Lord are the still waters by which the saints are led; the streams which flow from the fountain of living waters.
3. The valley of the shadow of death may denote the most severe and terrible affliction one could come under. Yet, "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

C. 1 Peter 5:8-11.

1. Satan is the source of all evil and suffering.
2. God is able to "perfect" (mend or repair) us and make us strong.

3. Whatever pain we might have, the eternal God comforts us (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Therefore, we can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).
- D. Jude 24.
1. The audience to whom Jude wrote was vulnerable to heresies and temptations toward immoral living.
 2. Jude encouraged the believers to remain firm in their faith and trust in God's promises for their future.
 3. This was important because they were living in a time of increased apostasy. We too are living in the last days, much closer to the end than were the original readers of this letter.
 4. Although there is iniquity around us, we need not be afraid or give up in despair. God is able to keep us from falling, and to bring us into His presence and give us abundant joy (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

II. We Take Courage Because We Have Each Other

- A. We are a spiritual family, and every one of us is important.
1. The very least in the kingdom is greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11).
 2. Jesus stated in Luke 13:28-30 that the first shall be last and the last first.
 - a) The humble, lowly person will be saved; the proud will not.
 - b) Who would have thought that a worthless thief in Luke 23:43 would have been saved? Yet he was because he believed.
- B. There are several examples of Christians giving encouragement to one another in the New Testament.
1. The Christians at Antioch were encouraged by Barnabas (Acts 11:22-24).
 2. The Christians at Philippi were encouraged by Paul and Silas (Acts 16:40).
 3. The Christians at Ephesus were encouraged by Apollos (Acts 18:27).
 4. The Christians at Thessalonica were encouraged by Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3).
- C. The tie that binds us together in our spiritual relationship is love (Romans 12:9-21).
1. "Let love be without dissimulation ... Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love ... Recompense to no man evil for evil" (vv. 9-10, 17).
 2. The kind of love Paul is emphasizing is a genuine concern for each other (vv. 13, 15-16). If knowing that God loves you and that your brethren love you doesn't brighten your day, I don't know what will.
 3. There had better never come a time when we will say to one another, "I have no need of you" (1 Corinthians 12:21-22).
- D. Stick together and encourage one another in love (Ephesians 4:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:24-25). The old saying, "United we stand, divided we fall" is just as true with the church as it is with an earthly organization. We cannot encourage when we bite and devour (Galatians 5:15).

III. We Take Courage Because We Have A Better World Beyond

- A. Paul said in Galatians 6:9 that we will reap in due time if we do not grow weary.

1. "Grow weary" means "to succumb to fatigue" (John 4:6; 2 Corinthians 11:27).
 2. "Well doing" means "doing the good works which God ordained" (Ephesians 2:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:13).
- B. We will all reap as we have sown.
1. It is discouraging to continue to do right and receive no word of thanks or see no tangible results. But Paul challenged the Galatians and he challenges us to keep on doing good and to trust God for the results.
 2. In due time, we will reap the harvest of blessings.
 - a) There is a better place beyond the grave, and we need to keep our eyes focused on it (1 Peter 1:13).
 - b) Paul suffered many hardships (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).
 - (1) Yet, he called them a "light affliction" (2 Corinthians 4:16).
 - (2) He could only do this by keeping his mind focused on the eternal glory that will follow.
 - (3) It is far better to depart and be with Christ (Philippians 1:23).
 - (4) In Heaven, God will wipe away all tears (Revelation 21:4).

Conclusion. Disappointments, discouragements, and hardships will come. We need to be steadfast and unmovable ourselves. The eternal God is perfectly able to comfort. Someday we will reap if we will not give up. Strengthen yourself in the Lord.