

36. Hope for the down and out

July 3, 2016

Unlike unbelievers who place their hope on material things, other people's kindness, and circumstances, we, born-again Christians can always have hope in God. In spite of this important principle, we often think that we can only enjoy His presence, security, and hope in our lives as long as everything goes our way.

But when a heaviness settles on our souls due to the difficulties in life, we have a tendency to forget everything about what the Lord taught us and we often panic. Doubt starts dragging us down. Hope seems to fade away. And we go down in a spiral case. We sink into an abyss of uncertainty. Darkness engulfs us. We feel terribly alone. What causes this crazy bewilderment? What makes us question the love of God for us?

Let's consider a few of the heaviest sources of doubt:

1) How can God be in control when evil seems out of control?

When hardships lack reason or calamities defy justification, we tend to doubt God's divine purpose in our lives.

2) Does God care about our prayers?

Unanswered prayers can confuse us. When we pray for what we know is God's will according to Scripture and nothing happens, we wonder about God's goodness.

3) Is God fair?

Unfair treatment troubles us. When we do what's right and suffer for it, we question God's justice.

Questions like these can hurt our spirits if we let them. Some of us try to come to church, but worship feels forced. The sermon seems miles away. Fellowship is nothing more than "Hi and Bye". You leave church with heavy hearts in isolation wondering if anyone cares. Yes, God cares and we care.

Our God Jesus Christ puts an unquenchable fire and light of hope in our hearts as we turn to Him and focus on Him. We are going to encounter four groups of people this morning – the one with great faith, the one with no faith, the one who once had faith, and the ones who reject Jesus. I believe that the Lord has great lessons of hope for us.

A. HOPE FOR THE ONE WITH GREAT FAITH

Luke 7:1-10 Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. 2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. 3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, 5 "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." 6 Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and

he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 9 When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" 10 And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

He was a Roman centurion – an officer in charge of one hundred soldiers, "the backbone of the Roman army." His slave could have been like a father or like his own brother. This kind hearted soldier couldn't just sit and watch his dear friend die. But what could he do? He felt helpless. In his desperation, he requested the elders of the Jews to go to Jesus, the miracle worker in the region of Galilee. He reached out to Jesus with great faith.

We don't need to have the centurion's concern today. We don't need to send a representative to Jesus – we can come to Him ourselves. We don't need a pastor or priest to pray to God for us. If you are a born-again Christian, you are His child and the Father in heaven hears your prayer.

We are impressed not only with this man's great love, but also his great humility. Imagine a Roman officer telling a poor Jewish rabbi that he was unworthy to have Him enter his house. The Romans were not known for displaying humility, especially before their Jewish subjects.

But the characteristic that most impressed Jesus was the man's faith. Twice in the Gospels, we are told that Jesus marveled at someone's faith. Here in Capernaum, He marveled at the faith of a Gentile. And in Nazareth, He marveled at the unbelief of the Jews in Mark 6:6. The only other person Jesus commended for having "great faith" was a Gentile woman whose daughter He delivered from a demon in Matthew 15:28.

One thing we should not forget here is this: In response to the centurion's initial request, Jesus simply starts to head toward his home. Jesus could have healed the slave with a word from a distance. This being an emergency, why did He wait? Why didn't He say the word then and there?

When it comes to our growth process, the Lord is never in a hurry. We focus on the present need, but God sees the bigger picture. He's more interested in helping us grow through our problems than fixing them for us immediately. By waiting, Jesus allows the centurion's budding faith to blossom into maturity.

Jesus gave hope of God to the household of the Centurion who had great faith.

B. HOPE FOR THE ONE WITH NO FAITH

Luke 7:11-17 Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. 12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. 16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited

His people.” 17 And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

About 25 miles southwest from Capernaum, in the village of Nain, another person stood on the edge of death. A widow. She had been here before to watch the death that consumed her husband. But now she was back, this time with her only son. In horror, she watched him slide over the edge. With him her last and tattered hope went down. It was the day of his funeral when she crossed paths with Jesus.

We see a direct contrast here in this portion of the Scripture. The people who were following Jesus, without realizing, were following the Author of life. The other group of people who were following this young man’s funeral procession were following the death that brings an end to the life in this world. The life and death – in this stark contrast, Jesus had compassion for the mother who not only lost her husband and only son, but also the hope to live for. To her, the life was cruel.

The Word of Faith movement teachers insist that you have to have faith in faith for God to do incredible miracles. In my opinion, raising a dead person would be on the top of that list. However, in this occasion, there was not one person who had faith in Jesus, nor did anyone request a miracle from Him. He simply had compassion for the mother.

Compassion has been defined as “your pain in my heart.” Jesus’ heart was aching for this disheartened woman who lost hope and was too numb to cry. Out of the depths of His mercy, He produced an incredible miracle – raising her dead son to life.

Can you imagine how that funeral procession turned into a group of wild laughing, rejoicing, and awestruck people?

Jesus sees beyond the physical to the spiritual. He has the power to resuscitate the dead, to reunite spirit and body. And that is our ultimate hope, isn’t it? Not just resuscitation, but resurrection. Someday the trumpet call of God will be sounded. The dead in Christ will be raised. And Christ will have done what we were helpless to do on our own – taking us to the eternal home.

Jesus gave hope of God to the mother who had no faith.

C. HOPE FOR THE ONE WHO ONCE HAD FAITH

Luke 7:18-30 Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. 19 And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” 20 When the men had come to Him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” 21 And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. 22 Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. 23 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” 24 When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxu-

ry are in kings' courts. 26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' 28 For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." 29 And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Could this be the same man who, just a few months earlier, had uttered his announcement about the Son of God?

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Somewhere along the line, his exclamation point had secretly curled into a question mark: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

John had never known doubt. Hunger, yes. Loneliness, often. But doubt? Never. Only raw conviction, ruthless pronouncements and rugged truth. Such was John the Baptist. Conviction as fierce as the desert sun. Until now. His courage started to shake as his prison time got longer. And as he faced his imminent death, he didn't raise a fist of victory, rather he raised only a question.

John was reasoning himself: "Jesus could do all those miracles and he was supposed to be the Son of God, shouldn't He spring me out of this miserable place?" Or did he make a mistake to think that his cousin Jesus the Messiah?

While you and I go through the time of difficulties physically, spiritually, and emotionally, satan throws at us his fiery darts that are the seeds of doubt in our minds. When discouragement has led us to believe that Jesus isn't really who we thought He was, we need to clear our eyes and look to God's Word to see who He really is.

In John's defense, Jesus declared that John was the greatest of all the prophets in history. Now that is quite an achievement. But Jesus added a wild statement in v28. How can we who are born-again Christians be greater than John the Baptist? It is because John and other Old Testament prophets were repeating what the Lord told them to repeat. But we have the Holy Spirit who is God Himself residing in our hearts.

Jesus gave hope of God to John the Baptist who once had great faith.

D. NO HOPE FOR THE ONES WHO REJECT JESUS

Luke 7:31-35 And the Lord said, "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not weep.' 33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 But wisdom is justified by all her children."

Jesus compared that generation to people who were childish, not childlike, and nothing pleased them.

People who want to avoid the truth about themselves can always find something to criticize in the preacher's sermon. This is one way they "justify themselves."

Some people who come to our church don't like what I teach – the raw Word of God without compromise. They say, "His Swedish accent is too hard to understand," or "He is not humorous like some other pastors," or "I don't like his teaching style, especially using the Bible." If they choose to listen, the Holy Spirit will open their ears to understand everything that they need to hear from my teachings. One of them told me, "You convict me too much." So he no longer comes to the church. He can run from the truth of the Word of God, but he cannot hide from it.

Hope is not what we expect. It is what we would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a "pinch-me-I-am-dreaming" ending. It's Abraham adjusting his bifocals so he can see, not his grandson, but his son. It's Moses standing in the Promised Land, not with Aaron or Miriam at his side, but with Elijah and the transfigured Christ. And it is two of Jesus' disciples on their way to Emmaus reaching out to take a piece of bread, only to see that the hands from which it is offered are pierced.

God gives hope to those who trust in Him in spite of the situations and circumstances they are in. We must take our eyes off what we see, but focus on the immortal, invisible, the only wise God, and His unchanging Word. He never fails.

Jesus can give hope of God to anyone who even rejected Jesus in the past, if he or she only trusts in Him in faith.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) We need to share our eternal hope in God with those who are going through a dark tunnel without any hope.

Share Jesus with them in love, not in preaching, but a testimony. Tell them what the Lord has done in your life. And help them physically, if you can.

2) Doubting may temporarily disturb us, but it doesn't have to destroy our relationship with Christ permanently.

3) Being childlike is commendable, but being childish is unacceptable.