

A Word for the Down-Hearted

by Alan Redpath

God's promise is to comfort the down-hearted and give them hope for the future, reminding them to look back to the rock from which they were hewn and consider the grace of God.

Duration: 29:12

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4, Isaiah 51:1, Isaiah 51:3-4, Isaiah 51:7, Joel 2:25, Philippians 3:13-14

Topics: "Discouragement"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses those who are feeling discouraged and downhearted. God speaks to His people, urging them to listen to Him amidst the various voices they have been hearing. The preacher emphasizes the importance of truly hearing and understanding God's message. He encourages the listeners to look back at their past and recognize their humble origins, which deepens humility and magnifies God's grace. The preacher also highlights the need to have faith in God's ability to restore and make use of their lives, even in seemingly hopeless situations.

Transcript

In Isaiah 50 verse 4, the Lord God, speaking of the Lord Jesus here, hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. But you know, beloved, once you get eaten up with discouragement and unbelief, it takes an awful lot of shaking you out of it.

Those two things are the master strokes of Satan. Let a Christian keep praising God and rejoicing in the Lord always, and he's invincible. But let the devil get him discouraged, and that poor man is really going to get knocked around.

And so today we have a word in this chapter to the person who's discouraged, to the person who's downhearted, to a person who thinks, well, what's the use anyway? For notwithstanding the promises of deliverance from exile and the summons to depart, the Israelite could not bring himself to believe that he could ever be any use again. He remembered the wastes of the past life in Jerusalem, remembered the broken-down walls, and felt the case to be hopeless. But I am so glad this morning that I know a Savior who restores to us the years that the canker worm hath eaten.

And I am so glad that I know a God, and when I know him, I do know with all of my heart, it's never too late to begin again. Bless the Lord, O my soul. And so the call of God comes to us afresh this morning in what I

have called retrospect and prospect.

A subheading might be a word for the downhearted. And God brings his people to recognize their position and to speak to them here in this 51st chapter by asking them to look back at the past, to look on at the future, and in the recognition of the past and in the assurance of the future, to stand their ground today. Three times in these verses that were read to us, you have the voice of God saying, hearken to me, in verse 1, in verse 4, and in verse 7. Now, says the Lord, you've listened to about every other voice you can.

You've listened to the Job's comforters. You've listened to the inward whisper of the devil saying it's useless. You've listened to people who've told you, well, the situation's too bad, you might as well give up.

You've listened to that. Now then, stop it, says the Lord, and hearken to me. It's possible to listen to a sermon but never to hear it.

Now, I'm concerned this morning that you listen and you hear. There's always a precious orderliness in everything that God says. He never speaks out of order.

He never puts first things last or last things first. And in the first verse of this chapter, he says, hearken to me, who? You that follow after righteousness and seek the Lord. Verse 4, he says, hearken unto me, my people.

And in verse 7, he says, hearken unto me, ye that know my righteousness, in whose heart is my law. What a wonderful sequence. If I follow after righteousness, this is an indication that God has put a hunger for himself in my heart and I am his.

And because I am his, therefore I will know his righteousness and his law will be in my heart. God is always orderly. What does he say then to those who follow after righteousness? To those who, because they follow, indicate by so doing that they are his and they will know his righteousness, what does he say to them? Remember, if you're discouraged today, just one minute, says the Lord, just stop a moment, just stop a moment and look back.

Verse 1, look unto the rock whence you are hewn and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. A nation reduced at this time to a mere little remnant, a handful, under the tyranny of a power that seemed to be utterly overwhelming, to whom rescue from that situation seemed impossible, that God could ever do another thing with them. God says to them, now before you take that attitude, you go right back to the beginning and look to the rock from which I pulled you out and the pit from which I dug you.

Remember the lowliness and the obscurity of your origin. It's good for you and me to do that. It deepens our humility.

It magnifies the grace of God. I pray always that God will show to me all the possibilities in my heart because, believe me, they are all in the downward direction. There are very strong ties to the pit from which we were dug and very often the Christian is ashamed of his likeness to the family from which God has sent him.

It's good to look back and if we do, none of us will boast that we're here today, nor will we boast of any transformation in our lives because if there be a difference, God has done it all. And if you look back at the origin and at the beginning, if he has done so much, then bless the Lord, he will complete what he has done. He never leaves a task half finished.

If the stone has been hewn out of the rock, it can be polished. If he has justified us, then he can sanctify us. If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by his death, how much more will we be saved by his life.

And so, it was for their encouragement that Israel was directed to the backward look. And even though they're only a handful now, they're more than what God began with. He began with one man.

Oh, but they say to him, yes, but the pruning, the pruning and the cutting down are so merciless and the disciplines have been so hard to take and the punishment so desperately difficult to bear and quite frankly, the flesh groans under it all. But, says God, wait. Look how I dealt with Abraham.

You're following me, aren't you, in your Bible? Look unto Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who bear you. Just look. Just look.

God called Abraham alone, says the scripture. Yes, alone. In the process of that call, his father, Tira, died.

His nephew, Lot, dropped out by the wayside. Pace was too hot for him. His wife's plan, that Abraham should have a child by another woman, in order to hasten the promise of God, fell apart.

Isaac, the child of promise, was laid on the altar and Abraham's faith was tried almost beyond endurance. Twenty-five years went past between the time that God promised him a child and the child was born. By that time, natural force was spent.

And then, when the child was born, there came may I say it reverently, the ridiculous command, looking at it from the human angle, the ridiculous command to slay the child of promise. As if God gave him the thing that he'd promised him and then immediately was about to take it away. To teach Abraham that he must be all in all.

And this man who was to be the father of this great nation and in whom all families of the world should be blessed, should be a man who had been stripped of every bit of confidence in the flesh, that he might die to all of that. And there came a day, when you will recall, the writer to the Hebrew epistle said of him this, Thy faith Abraham, when he was tried, when he was tested, offered up Isaac and he that received the promises offered up his only begotten son of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead. Now, says the Lord to his discouraged people, after all these years of testing and trial, look back a moment, look back to the way in which I began with you.

Like that. And beloved, to some discouraged, disheartened Christian today, God is asking you to do this very thing. For the way in which God dealt with Abraham is exactly the way in which he deals with you and with me.

It's typical. As he takes his child to be his own and as we're born again of the spirit he begins from that moment and he cuts down to the very roots of myself until he strips us of reputation and prestige, nothing of this to hinder our progress, but that there might be a destruction of every bit of confidence in that life that I might wait upon him for the abounding inflow of his grace and power. God hasn't any taste for big battalions or great big regiments.

He chooses an Abraham, a Gideon, a Luther, a Livingston, a Carey, a Wesley, a Judson, a Brainerd, a D.L. Moody. And through one man, just through one man who's followed and accepted the principles of

God's dealing and who's stood, as it were, under the pruning knife. Through that man, God in history has brought whole nations to the feet of the Lord Jesus, clothed and in the right mind.

Well, Abed, are you feeling the hopelessness of your case today? Are you feeling under a cloud? Do you feel it's just hopeless to continue? Well then, for a moment, remember the pit. Consider the grace of God. Are you but a little tiny channel for his blessing and think you don't count why the whole ocean of his fullness can be poured into your life? The question is not what you can do or what you can't do at this point, but what are you willing for God to do? And the only condition of accomplishment is his presence in your heart.

And therefore today, something happens to a Christian who recognizes this. I'll show it to you. Look at verse 3 in this chapter.

What a verse it is. Isaiah 51 and verse 3. The Lord shall comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places.

He will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. Fasten a moment upon words here.

Listen. Waste places, wilderness, desert. Does that describe you? Is that your life? Honestly? Before God? Just a waste place? Just a wilderness? Just a desert? But here's God's promise to the man who's utterly discouraged.

It's this. The Lord will comfort Zion. He will make the wilderness like Eden and the desert like the garden of the Lord.

He asks you therefore today, if you're discouraged as a Christian and on the point of giving up, to look back to the pit from which he digged you. But he asks you to do something else. He asks you to look on to future glory.

Look at the next word. Harken unto me, my people. Give ear unto me, my nation.

Verse 5. My righteousness is near. My salvation is gone forth and mine arms shall judge the people. The isles shall wait upon me and on mine arms shall they trust.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look upon the earth beneath. For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner. But my salvation shall be forever and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

My salvation shall be forever. My righteousness shall not be abolished. What is God saying? Now he says look up to the heavens and look down to the earth in the midst of your testing and your discouragements and so on.

The things that make you feel it so hopeless. You've taken a good look back at the pit. Now look on.

Look up to the heavens and look down to the earth. Well, they seem solid enough. No change can come to them.

Oh yes, it can. And indeed it will. For one day my Bible tells me there will be a new heavens and a new earth and these shall wax old like a garment.

And amidst all the wreck and all the judgment that comes one day God's salvation, he says, remains. We don't know how long the world will continue as it is. We don't know how long before the unveiling of the Lord.

We don't know how long before the King shall come. We don't know how long before the judgment of the great throne of God. We don't know how long before the resurrection of the living and of the dead.

I don't know. We don't know how long before all the elements shall burn up, as Peter himself tells us. But this thing we do know, that God and Jesus and God's people endure through it all.

They're accepted in the Lord. They're washed in his blood. They're members of his body and of one another.

They're the bride of Christ and they're absolutely indestructible no matter what may happen all around us. God sees us through. So he says to his people who are discouraged, look on.

You see, friend, when you and I partake of Jesus and when he comes into our lives, I have acquired someone in my heart who is permanent and who defies time and change and circumstance, whatever it may be. He's come to stay. It isn't what I possess that's going to stay.

It's what I am that's going to stay. And he has come by his Spirit to root in my heart to produce that life in me that can never be destroyed. What is that life? Oh, it's the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit.

And it's our love for one another. It's the patience and strength and courage and faith which are acquired in the midst of the furnace of trial. These things don't vanish in a puff of smoke.

If they did, if they did, what would be the use of God's painstaking care over his people? You and I are at school today. That's what we are. And we'll continue in school till we get to heaven.

The school may vanish. The school may crash around us. But that which I have learned and acquired into my heart and into my life while I have been at school will remain forever.

Christian, don't complain and murmur at God's slow process in educating his children. Don't complain at that. Don't complain at the care that God takes over his people to be sure that we master each lesson.

Have you noticed how the Lord takes us back and back again over the same ground until we almost scream and we say, but Lord, I've learned that lesson. I'm through with that, but he'll bring us back again to it and over and over again. He'll take us back to the same place until we've learned the lesson.

You see, beloved, the Lord is not a university professor teaching us for fifty years. He's God eternal who's training us for eternity. Got that? Therefore I say, I say, don't complain at the care that he takes.

He's working with an eternal purpose in view. And a man's life does not consist of that which he possesses but it consists of meekness, faith, devotion, love, consecration, dedication, Christlikeness. And believe me, my dear brother and sister, many a man has forfeited everything of the material that he might find in his life, the reality of the spiritual.

I count all things but lust, says the apostle Paul in Philippians 3, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but refuse that I might

be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness which of the law but that which is of God through faith that I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his resurrection and be conformed unto his death. Ah yes, I'm at school today and so are you, so are you. And in the midst of discouragement and disappointment the Lord says, now look back but look on and all that you can see is the immediate, is the immediate test, the immediate trial, the immediate thing which almost you'd give anything to get out from under.

But God says, look on, look on, be patient, I'm not training you for a little while down here, I'm training you to be with me forever in glory and that takes a while. And I'm going to take you back and back and back and back to the kindergarten, to the first grade and I'm going to go over and over and over the ground until when you come to see me face to face, I know you've learned the lesson, school. Well then beloved if this be true hearken unto me says the Lord, look at the pit.

Hearken unto me, look at the glory. Hearken unto me, stand your ground. Verse seven, he that know righteousness the people in whose heart is my law fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

Now at first sight that may sound very unusual to link together men in whose law, in whose heart is the law of God and in the next breath men men who are filled with reviling on their account. But stop a moment and check this with your own experience and let me do the same. A man in whose heart is the law of God, that is to say a man who's born again of the Spirit and because he's born again of the Spirit he's living a different life.

He's had a new power imparted to him and a new principle. He's remembered the pit, he's looked forward to the glory he's going through the school and he's bearing the testings and the trials, he sees them in a new significance now for he sees that God has him in his hand polishing the shaft, the stone as it were, sanctifying the Christian, the man who's been justified to present him one day faultless and this man's going through school and he sees all this and because of this, because of this he's living his life on this new principle. Now listen, inevitably that man clashes with the ungodly or shall I put it this way, inevitably the ungodly clash with him.

When I say ungodly I don't mean somebody who's immoral, I just simply mean what the word says, ungodly, without God without God. And immediately any man who lives, who lives in the power of God's Spirit, who has the law of God not in his head but in his heart and who's living out this principle of the Christian life in the power of his indwelling with eternity in view, immediately that man is hit head on by every ungodly man he meets. Of course.

Of course. Because you see, the ungodly react in self-defense. Either they're right and we're wrong, or we're right and they're wrong and they're not prepared to admit they're wrong.

And so in self-defense and in order to establish their position and justify the stand they take and to destroy every evidence of spiritual value, they will come into a head-on collision with the man who is godly. Let me say something very quietly but very firmly. If that isn't happening in your life as a believer, you're not a child of God.

If you want me to justify that statement from the book, I'll do it for you, if you come and talk to me about it. The godly man in whose life is the law of God and the man who's living along that principle is such a rebuke to the ungodly that the moment the ungodly see him and recognize the principles on which he's

living and the new standards of his life, they begin to revile in order to justify their position. Now, hearken unto me.

Ye that know righteousness, fear ye not their approach of men, neither be ye afraid of their abiding. For if I am related by grace to the living God, I'm not afraid of a dying man. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 11 says this to me, and I turn it over in my mind and in my heart, and I just chew it over with such a sense of thrill.

Blessed, blessed, happy are ye when men when men do all manner say all manner of evil falsely against you for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. Let me just put in a word of caution.

If you suffer because you're a mean sort of Christian, don't try and shelter under that text, will you? If you suffer because you're mean and because you're always going around ramming a tract into somebody's face and saying, brother, are you saved? Well, you'll get what you expect, and you deserve it. Now, of course, I'm all for giving somebody a tract. I think it's a very good thing, but I think in doing it, you've got to be very sure that you are revealing the grace and the loveliness and the sweetness of Jesus Christ in your approach.

And if there's something about your Christianity that is unattractive, and if it's repulsive, then don't complain if people are constantly reviling you. Ah, but if you are living with the law of God in your heart, and this law has gripped your life, and you're living on this principle, and you're obeying him, then blessed are they when men say all manner of evil falsely, for great is your reward in heaven. You know, isn't it amazing? Folks are always trying to wear out the saints, but they haven't got a hope, because you see, the saint is fed from the nature of God, from the throne in heaven, and that nature is everlasting.

My salvation is near. I think I've learned in life by now, beloved, I'm a slow learner, but I think I've learned this much, that the clouds may hide the sun sometimes, but the clouds don't stop the sun's progress, it just goes on. And the clouds may hide Jesus.

Sometimes, sometimes the vision may grow dim, sometimes my heart may be in the depths of despair, but you remember the chorus? Do you? God is still on the throne, and he will remember his own. Though trials may press us and burdens distress us, he never will leave us alone. God is still on the throne, and he will remember his own.

His promise is true, he will not forget you. God is still on the throne. Harken unto me, think of the pit, think of the glory, stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath set you free, and say hallelujah anyway.

Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, may these truths sink deep into our hearts and lift us up from discouragement and despair, that we may recognize thou art working with us and in us and through us, not for time, but for eternity. And enable us today, as the law of God is in our hearts, and as men would revile us and accuse us falsely, enable us to stand in the liberty of the risen Lord.

Oh, may we not only listen, but hear thy word this day for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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