

Losing Heart

~ Ecclesiastes 2:20 "So I gave my heart up to despair." In the King James Bible it is that this gentleman *went about to cause* his heart to despair of everything that he did.

So, it is true that people are generally about as happy as they've made up their minds to be.

While the seat of the scornful may still have a few vacancies, the seat of the mournful is filled to overflowing. It is no trick to get folk to look down; it is a struggle to get them to look up.

Billy Sunday once said, "If you have no joy in your religion, there is a leak somewhere."

Charles Spurgeon said, "It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy that makes us happy." It is we Americans who believe in "life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness."

Yet, this preacher seems half gleeful in his gloom, because, as he says in his sermon, he has so much to be gloomy about. However, before we become proud of our despair, or even complacent about it, we would do well to face certain facts.

First, despair is not an asset; it is a liability. This is the case no matter how well we justify it. Despair is a kill-joy, taking the spring out of our step, the sparkle out of our eye, and the song out of our heart. It is so for this fellow. He said frankly that he hated life. He declared that those who were dead were better off than those who are alive, but the most fortunate people of all were those who had never been born in the first place. He found nothing glad or beautiful in life. He said that laughter was mad; he saw nothing humorous.

It is a bad thing to be born blind; it is worse to be born without a sense of humor. Happy is the person who can laugh *with* others and *at* him or herself. Imagination was given to man to compensate for what he is not, and a sense of humor to console him for what he is.

Furthermore, despair paralyzes all effort toward building a better world, a better nation, a better church, a better individual. This man was a very gifted man. He had a tremendous capacity to help; yet, in spite of that fact he was far more harmful than helpful. For him, life had neither meaning nor purpose. There might be one good person in a thousand, but that seemed doubtful.

Worse yet, there was nothing anybody could do about it, since the crooked could never be straightened. His was a drab world where there could be nothing new under the sun, least of all a new person. So his only recourse was to get drunk and forget the whole mess.



Despair is a menace to us all. Courage is contagious, but so is despair. If we persist in despair, we not only rob ourselves but others as well.

Secondly, if we are in despair it is very likely our own fault. Of course, we do not believe this any more than the fellow in our story. He had been everywhere and seen everything. Not only that, but he looked with clearer eyes than other people. Having looked, and having found everything bad, he was half happy in reaching the conclusion that there was nothing better to do than to despair.

However, the fact is, despair is more a child of the heart than a child of circumstances. If despair were really born of circumstances alone, then all those who are experiencing dark circumstances should also experience the same degree of gloom. Yet, that is not so. For example, there was a group of people on an ancient ship battered by storm for two weeks. All who were on the ship were in the same circumstance; yet, one of them said, "Take heart people." That person was the Apostle Paul.

Naturally, it is easier to despair in some circumstances than in others. Yet, if despair were purely a child of circumstances then it would be easy to divide the hopeless from the hopeful. All we need to do is find all the poor and all of the terminally ill or those suffering from some ailment --all those who have lost out --all the jalopy drivers, and line them up against the people of good fortune, with expensive new cars, health, success, money and good business. We could then say, "These children of good fortune are always abounding in hope, while these children of ill fortune are always in despair. Such is not the case at all.

No one is going to come along and make you happy, and if they tried, you wouldn't let them. Everyone of us is responsible for his or her own outlook. It follows, that if we are in despair it is partly our own job to see things in a better light. So the fellow said, "I gave up my heart to despair." He did not have to; he simply made a spineless surrender to despair. It is our job to fight it not to give in to it.

A third fact is, since despair is so hurtful to ourselves and to others, it is more than a misfortune. If persisted in too long, it gains a moral dimension. No person has the right to steal my money. Even so, no one has a right to steal what is more priceless than gold --my courage, my hope, my joy, my future. Yet, even the best intentioned of us are too often responsible for this kind of heartless behavior.

Whenever we, by any means, take the heart out of our brother or sister and send him or her bumping away on 4 flat tires, we have done a cruel thing. Our Scripture clearly tells us to look for the best in our friends and fellows. You don't need to be smart to point out weakness and fault. I have often wondered how many rotten apples have been sold with the label "constructive criticism." We do well to remember that most criticism is "destructive criticism." We have to wonder if "constructive criticism" is not just a new convenient sale for old fashioned faultfinding.

At the end of his life John Watson said, "If I had my ministry to go over again, I would preach more comforting sermons." Every Sunday people come to our churches with wistful hearts, hoping the minister will say something that will give them strength to climb the next hill. Much of the teaching of

our Lord Jesus can be summed up in a word: "Take heart." To encourage is Christian. To discourage is devilish.

Naturally, if we are to give courage to others we must have courage in our own hearts. We cannot give what we do not have. We must be hopeful if we want to inspire hope. To tell a friend to "take heart" when our own face is dark with gloom is to be downright exasperating. How, then, shall we help ourselves to attain a contagious courage?

First, take care of your body as best you can. The most Christian thing to do when you are exhausted is rest. Jesus taught this many times. "Come away to a quiet place and rest... You who are weary, come to me and I will give you rest." Get out there and look at God's nature, it's healing. We cannot serve our best if we neglect our bodies. Then, **do something**; people who find purposeful work are less depressed.

Elijah was a wonderful person, yet he came to the point of telling the Lord that he was the only good person in the world, and that he hoped that he wouldn't be in the world too much longer. In that request, I do not think he was quite sincere. If he really wanted to die, his prayer would not have been necessary. All he needed to do would have been to stop over at Jezreel for an hour or so; Jezebel was prepared to answer that prayer for him.

Elijah was physically exhausted and it is far more difficult to be hopeful if one is exhausted. Psalm 30:5 "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." It is hard to be hopeful when you are tired; things always look better in the morning when you are rested. Once rested, it is easier to be hopeful. That is why the Bible says, "Hope comes in the morning."

Then remember, your situation is not entirely bad. The situation that this man faced was nothing like he pictured it. He declared that while there was order in the realm of nature, there was chaos in the realm of the spiritual. He saw fools on horseback and princes walking. He saw the wicked reaping the rewards of the righteous, while the righteous were reaping the reward of the wicked.

On the other hand, he believed that what a farmer planted in the field would be what the farmer harvested --wheat for wheat, corn for corn. Yet, he did not think that could be true in life. However, the planting/harvesting rule is universally true. It is true all of the time and it is at work everywhere. It was Paul who said, "Do not be weary in well doing, for in due season you will reap if you keep on." To the person who sees things clearly and sees them whole, people do harvest what they plant.

Though a Christian may suffer in purse and body, he or she is assured that all these things will work together somehow for his or her good. Certainly, there is much bad in the world, but there is also much good in the world. Jesus spoke of four kinds of soil: wayside, which was useless because it was hard; rocky soil, which was also useless because it is shallow; weedy soil, which was useless because it is given to a worthless cause; but there is also good soil, some so good that it brings forth 30, 60, and 100 times profit.

Now, just as no situation is entirely bad, neither is any individual. We have a great love for painting scenes and persons as absolutely white or absolutely black. Such a picture is always wrong. The very best of us can stand improving, perhaps a great deal of improving. We know that! Even so, there is something good in the worst of us. Do not complain when good soil brings forth 30 fold instead of 100 fold; it is still good soil.

But the supreme cure for despair is faith --faith in God. Faith never looks at what is, but what God can do. Saying it in another way, "Where there is no **vision** the people perish." No one can face all the facts and be utterly cast down. No one can face all the facts and be a confirmed child of despair. The ten spies faced all the facts of their situation, except one --and that was the *fact of God*. The result of not facing that fact was that they became a burden to themselves and a menace to others.

Of all the books that face the facts, none surpass the Bible. If you want to take a good look at "ugly us" --then read the Old Testament. Yet, it is the most hopeful of all books. It has kindled more courage in the hearts of more people than any other book. Why? Because it is constantly facing the worst, in the light of the *fact of God*. "**But God**, who is rich in mercy." "**But God**, so loved the world." "Once we lived in the passions of our flesh and so were by nature the children of wrath, **but God**, even when we were dead made us alive."

Joseph was sold by his brothers, given up as dead --a hopeless situation. **But God** was with him. Even though people knew nothing better to do with Jesus Christ than to hang him on a cross, that was not the final word. "**But God** raised him from the dead."

Over and against the blackest that people can be or do, stands **the radiant fact of God**. God and despair can never keep house in the same heart at the same time. There is one big thing that has kept Gloria and I faithful in ministry. There is a voice that says, "Don't worry about the odds; don't worry about "Chicken Little" going about with a "sky is falling message," **you are working for God**.

May we join Paul in prayer as he prays: "May the God of *hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, **so that** by the power of the Holy Spirit **you may abound in hope**." Abound in *hope*, not *despair*. This is the hope that Christ gives, and this is the hope that is worth sharing with other people. No matter how bad things may be, **there is always the fact of God**.

Take that fact home with you; take it with you wherever you go; take it with you into every circumstance.

Do you think you have it hard? Well then, back up a few years with me. The picture still fills my mind. We are at a picnic in the park with a thirty-four-year-old woman and her four children. She is in the middle of the biggest fight with cancer that I have ever seen. She is also the most cheerful and grateful person there. Why? Because she knows that, no matter what lay ahead, **there is always the "Fact of God."** **She knows that "God is love."** She knows that love has the best chance of winning --no matter what. The very worst thing for this world would be **for there to be "no God."** -- No God, no love. So, is there love? Is there love? Well, there you have it! PROVEN; THERE IS A GOD (AND, HE JUST HAPPENS TO LOVE US) --SO, WE'LL BE O.K.!