

Hope for the Hopeless

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10/30/2016

INTRODUCTION

From our shortsighted standpoint, sometimes the future appears bleak and hopeless.

Consider the despair of Naomi, widowed and childless, as she returned to the land of Judah: “I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:11-21, esp. vv. 12-13 & 19-21).

*Ruth 1:11-21 (NASB95) — 11 But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 **“Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.” 14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 “Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.” 18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. 19 **So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” 20 She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 “I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”*****

Ruth 1:19-21 (NASB95) — 19 So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” 20 She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 “I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

Consider the despondency of Job, battered and broken, who was robbed of children, wealth and physical well-being: “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to an end without hope” (Job 7:1-6, esp. vv. 5-6 ; cf. also 14:18-22; 19:7-12).

Job 7:1-6 (NASB95) — 1 “Is not man forced to labor on earth, And are not his days like the days of a hired man? 2 “As a slave who pants for the shade, And as a hired man who eagerly waits for his wages, 3 So am I allotted months of vanity, And nights of trouble are appointed me. 4 “When

I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night continues, And I am continually tossing until dawn. 5 "My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt, My skin hardens and runs. 6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope.

Job 14:18-22 (NASB95) — 18 "But the falling mountain crumbles away, And the rock moves from its place; 19 Water wears away stones, Its torrents wash away the dust of the earth; So You destroy man's hope. 20 "You forever overpower him and he departs; You change his appearance and send him away. 21 "His sons achieve honor, but he does not know it; Or they become insignificant, but he does not perceive it. 22 "But his body pains him, And he mourns only for himself."

Job 19:7-12 (NASB95) — 7 "Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. 8 "He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, And He has put darkness on my paths. 9 "He has stripped my honor from me And removed the crown from my head. 10 "He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; And He has uprooted my hope like a tree. 11 "He has also kindled His anger against me And considered me as His enemy. 12 "His troops come together, And build up their way against me And camp around my tent.

Consider the dejection of Israel, who had been invaded, defeated, and carried away into Babylonian captivity: "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off." (Ezek. 37:1-14, esp. v. 11).

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NASB95) — 1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. 3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, You know." 4 Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' 5 "Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord.' " 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life." ' " 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. 11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' 12 "Therefore prophecy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 "Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 14 "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it," declares the Lord.' "

DIVINE LOVING-KINDNESS

In her hopeless despair, Naomi did not take into account Ruth's loyalty or God's loving-kindness (Ruth 1:15-17; cf. Gen. 49:8-10).

Ruth 1:15-17 (NASB95) — 15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

Genesis 49:8-10 (NASB95) — 8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. 9 "Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? 10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

DIVINE GREATNESS

In his hopeless despondency, Job did not take into account the greatness of Jehovah (Job 38:1-7; cf. Psa. 31:23-24; 43:5).

Job 38:1-7 (NASB95) — 1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 "Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! 4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 "On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Psalms 31:23-24 (NASB95) — 23 O love the Lord, all you His godly ones! The Lord preserves the faithful And fully recompenses the proud doer. 24 Be strong and let your heart take courage, All you who hope in the Lord.

Psalms 43:5 (NASB95) — 5 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

DIVINE REDEMPTION

In their hopeless dejection, Israel did not take into account God's restorative power (Ezek. 37:1-14; cf. Eph. 2:11-22).

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NASB95) — 1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. 2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. 3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, You know." 4 Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones

and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' 5 "Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord.' " 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9 Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life." ' " 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. **11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.'** 12 "Therefore prophecy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 "Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 14 "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it," declares the Lord.' "

Ephesians 2:11-22 (NASB95) — 11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Avoiding the human tendency of trusting in false hopes, let us trust in God (Psa. 33:16-22), and do His will, knowing there is a future for the faithful (Prov. 23:17-21).

*Psalm 33:16-22 (NASB95) — 16 The king is not saved by a mighty army; A warrior is not delivered by great strength. 17 **A horse is a false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength. 18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness,** 19 To deliver their soul from death And to keep them alive in famine. 20 Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. 21 For our heart rejoices in Him,*

Because we trust in His holy name. 22 Let Your lovingkindness, O Lord, be upon us, According as we have hoped in You.

Proverbs 23:17-21 (NASB95) — 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But live in the fear of the Lord always. 18 Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off. 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way. 20 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat; 21 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe one with rags.