

Encourage Yourself in the Lord



David Wilkerson December 1, 1983

"...But David encouraged himself in the Lord" (1 Samuel 30:6)

We begin our message with these familiar words: "And David was greatly distressed" (1 Samuel 30:6). He had just returned from Gath, where King Achish had said to him, "Thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God." With those praises ringing in his ears, David and his men returned to Ziklag, anxious to be reunited with their wives and children. They found their city burned to the ground, their homes destroyed, and their children and wives gone. The Amalekites had invaded while they were in Aphek and had taken captive all that was precious to David and his men.

What a horrible day of infamy in the life of this anointed man of God. "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep..." (1 Samuel 30:4)

The people rose up in anger, and there was talk of stoning David, because of their overwhelming grief. David himself was torn with grief, with not a tear left to shed. "And David was greatly distressed." They had come to the end of their rope, all hope gone and swallowed up in grief and despair.

Did all this calamity fall upon David because he was living in sin? Was he running from God? Far from it. If anything, David was running with God, but not understanding why the path led through such hard times.

Samuel had already anointed David king over Israel. He was declared to be a man after God's own heart, chosen and set apart to lead God's people. After a short time of acceptance in Saul's court and a glorious ministry of victory upon victory, he was forced to escape for his life. The giant killer ended up hiding in a cave, wondering what he had done to endure such rejection and difficulty. Tearfully he had inquired of Jonathan, "What have I done? What is mine iniquity? And what is my sin...that my life is threatened?" (1 Samuel 20:1)

The high priest called David "the most faithful servant in all the kingdom." Even Saul recognized his goodness and anointing, saying to him:

"Thou art more righteous than I...I know well that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand..." (1 Samuel 24:17, 20)

Is This the Way the Righteous Are Rewarded?

When Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). You have to begin here to understand David's terrible distress at Ziklag that day.

He knew he was called, specially chosen, destined to the throne. He had a daily visitation of God's Holy Spirit. He had a cause, he had zeal for the Lord, he was holy and burdened for the poor and needy. He lived a circumspect life that caused even his enemies to respect him.

Think of what must have gone through David's mind as he stood over the burning ruins of his home, not knowing whether his family was dead or alive. He must have asked the question. Why? when thinking over the past few

years, up to this very moment. "Why, if God is with me, did Saul try to kill me? Why was he so insanely jealous over me? Why, if I have been anointed, did I have to escape to Gath and pretend madness, acting like an insane fool? Why, if God's Spirit is upon me, guiding me, did I have to hide out in caves? Why, if I'm a man after God's heart, did I have to live in the wilderness, hunted down like a wild animal? Is this the reward of the anointed — sleepless nights fearing for my life, harassed on all sides, living on handouts, and outcast?"

Now, after finally finding a home and enjoying a few months of peace, it all crumbles in unbelievable disaster. Ziklag is in ruins, all is lost. To make matters even worse, David's closest associates were blaming him for the tragedy.

What a shoddy way for God to treat His anointed servant — at least that is the way it appears on the surface. He is no longer the giant killer whose praises are being sung by admiring crowds. He is no longer the mighty man of faith and vision, looked upon with respect and love. Now he is in total rejection, on the verge of being stoned as a failure. David stands alone, stripped and confused — in total despair.

What does a child of God do when discouragement sets in and he feels useless, like a complete failure, abandoned by God and rejected by those who once cared? His beloved friend Jonathan was nowhere in sight. How refreshing it might have been had he been able to talk to the one friend he knew would never let him down. Abigail had been taken from him. His parents were far away. Where shall he go for comfort? To whom shall he turn for encouragement?

God Brought David to This Dead-End

Believe it or not, God was in this apparent tragedy. If David is to become the man God uses, he must be stripped of everything, including his reputation and self-will. He must cry out of his system the last tears of self-pity. He must face the full fury of loneliness and overcome it. He must put away all memory of applause and praise for what he had accomplished.

He must not look to others for guidance, for comfort, for strength — not family, not friends, not associates. There would be no prophet to warn him, no priest to encourage him. Not even a child to hold his trembling hand. No brave soldiers to place a cup of cold water in his hand.

God fully intended that a crisis be allowed in David's life that would force him to seek an answer within himself. For sixteen months David had lived with the Philistines, and he had been leaning too heavily on King Achish. God wanted to give David the kingdom; he was about to settle for Ziklag. In no way would God permit David to settle down in a place that depended on the flesh for survival. Could it be that David had grown tired of the struggle, weary of so many battles, so many hardships? Was he thinking he had earned the right to an easier lifestyle? Was he about to trade his crown for ease and security?

Thank God David was made of better stuff. There was something in him, springing up, bringing new hope and assurance of God's leading.

"And David encouraged himself in the Lord..."

This was God's intention for David all along. This was the purpose behind all the hard times, the loneliness, the strange leadings of the Lord, God wanted David to get his eyes off all his enemies, off all his friends — and draw out of his own well the strength and encouragement he needed both now and in the future. David must learn to stand alone, dependent on God only and finding all he needed through personal communion and affection for the Lord.

What a victorious sight — David standing amid the ruins of his life — rejoicing in God's faithfulness and encouraging himself in the presence of the Lord. He came to see that all that really counts in the face of death and despair — is a personal knowledge of God.

Once the lesson was learned, God opened the heavens and spoke clearly to David. Directions came loud and clear. David inquired, and God answered. "Without fail you will recover all." There was nothing lacking — David recovered all.

From then on, David could look back and boast in the Lord, "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul..." (Psalm 138:3).

Where Do You Turn for Encouragement?

Are we willing to learn from David's experience? Will we recognize the reason for our hardships, and the strange leadings of the Lord in our lives?

I dare you to show me a single Christian who is wholly devoted to the Lord, who has an easy, trouble-free life. Show me a Spirit-led, God-filled, anointed servant of the Lord, and I'll show you one who is chased, chastened, often baffled, and familiar to deep waters and fiery furnaces.

Tell me your Christian life allows for no distress or hard times, and I'll have to believe God has no great purpose for your life. Those who seek to avoid the difficulties seldom get the revelation of God's fullness. They attempt to use faith to exempt themselves from crisis, not realizing they are robbing themselves of the greatest opportunity to find out what is really in them. Then one day when trouble can no longer be avoided, they cave in, having no proven source of inner strength.

Paul wrote, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16).

We are living in a day in which the Lord needs Christians who are not tossed about by every wind and wave of doctrine; who are not being made merchandise of; who have discernment and are not being deceived; who need no special human teacher with some new revelation; who do not need a human shepherd to guide their every step; who do not have to depend on someone else for their happiness or spiritual strength — but who have been tested and tried and have proven that the very life of God is in them, providing grace and mercy to help in every need. Christ has been revealed not only to them, but in them. They are drawing on the strength of their inner man, according to the riches of His glory.

Perhaps you can look back to a time when God did something truly special in your life. He separated you unto Himself, and filled you with His Holy Spirit. He called you, touching you with an anointing to do a special work. You started out like David, blessed, happy, and successful. People admired your sincerity and godly zeal. You were hungry for the deeper things of God and you were little in your own eyes. You set your heart to seek the Lord and desired to yield completely to His perfect will. You had friends who looked up to you and family behind you. Everybody recognized you as a man or woman of God. In your field of endeavor, you were fruitful.

But then God began to lead you in mysterious ways. In spite of your hunger for God, a spiritual dryness settled in on you. You wanted to pray, but the heavens seemed brass. There was not a word from heaven — communication was strained. The accuser had you searching your heart for sin, and you became introspective, wondering what you did to grieve the Lord, causing Him to withdraw. Your heart began to cry out, "Speak to me, Lord! Give me a new touch! I feel so useless — so cold!"

It is then we think to ourselves, "This dry spell, this coldness, this silence from heaven — can't be God. There must be something terribly wrong in my life. God must be grieved with me." It makes it all the harder when you can't find sin. You can only say in all honesty, "Why, Lord? Name my sin! Show it to me! Where did I fail? I thought I was really pleasing you. Why am I not making progress? Why can't I break through?"

What will you do? How will you escape from your spiritual doldrums and get back to rejoicing in God's love? You will do as David did — encourage yourself in the Lord! You can do that only after you recognize God's hand in all you are going through. Don't blame it on the devil or demon activity. God has permitted the hard times to cast you wholly on Himself. To wean you from all confidence in the flesh, to help you get your eyes off people, off books and sermons, off well-meaning friends and associates — and on the power of God that worketh in you.

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us..." (Ephesians 3:20).

We Must Learn to Encourage Ourselves in the Lord Because of the Troubled Times Just Ahead

Frightening, dark days are just ahead. Men of God can already feel the hot breath of God's wrath against the wicked. Peace will soon be shattered throughout the earth. I can find no Scripture in all the Bible that proves this country will be immune to nuclear bombs. Would God send fire on the Sodomites of Sodom and overlook the homosexual masses of America?

Every day the news gets worse, a little more ominous. There is a growing sense that something is about to trigger a world conflict. People are nervous, fearful, and distressed.

Where do the masses go for comfort? Who will encourage the ungodly? For them there is no comfort, no hope, no encouragement when the final calamities begin.

What if all radio and television evangelists are silenced? What if persecution or calamity makes it impossible to gather with friends and believers? What if we are all alone in some condition of ruin and rejection, as was David? Will you be in a position to encourage yourself in the Lord? Will you be able to rejoice and be at peace even when everything around you is crumbling?

Brothers, sisters in Christ — I beseech you in the name of the Lord, to open your eyes to the mighty power of God at work in you, and to appropriate the fulness and completeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter what fiery furnace we may be cast into, our supreme Lord will walk us through it.

The prophet Habakkuk was alarmed by the vision he received of the impending wrath of God on Judah. What he saw coming made his belly tremble, his lips to quiver, and he shook to the bones (Habakkuk. 3:16).

He saw a time coming when all the trees would be stripped, work would fail, there would be no more cattle, and the fields would be without grass. A whirlwind would devour, and the earth would be stricken and devoured. Habakkuk declared, "He will make my feet like hinds' [deer] feet, and he will make me walk upon mine high places..." (Habakkuk. 3:19).

Stephen proved that prophecy to the letter. He stood before a mad mob of fanatics with stones in their hands, poised and ready to kill him. The end was near for him. Soon he would be glorified and his work finished. Suddenly he looked up and saw an open heaven, and the Man Christ Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. He needed no other encouragement. He needed no other apostle to stand with him. He had seen the Lord on high and now he was above all the conditions on earth. The stones could not rob him of this vision. He had been given hind's feet — and he would walk right into his high place in Christ Jesus.

No matter how dark and hopeless the future, God's people are to encourage themselves in the Lord and rest on His great and precious promises. We are to claim the prophecy of Habakkuk, and take our heavenly place by faith. Let us run like a deer, leaping over all obstacles — to our heavenly place in Christ.

"But God...hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus..." (Ephesians 2:6).

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). Conclusion

David could have allowed himself to be crushed and overwhelmed by his distress. He could have gotten bitter and angry at God. There is a possibility of losing faith and never recovering.

But he did recover! He recovered everything and soon came into his full inheritance. Once again the heavens opened, God was speaking and he was back on the front line of spiritual warfare.

Are you distressed at present, desperately needing a fresh anointing? Reject all satanic lies, put away all despairing feelings — look up and rejoice — claim the promises of God's presence and faithfulness — accept His love — and be embraced by your loving Lord.

That is the word of the Lord to all who seek encouragement — Be embraced! You are going to recover — everything!
THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST! D.R.W.

When we speak of the Lordship of Jesus Christ we are talking about supremacy — highest in authority, rank, power and dominion. He cannot truly be the Lord of our lives until we understand and acknowledge Him as having all power in heaven and earth. To do this we must simultaneously believe that all other powers in heaven, earth or hell are vanquished, defeated, and ineffectual before the awesome dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ.
We Live Defeated Lives, Not Because of Satan, but Because of Ignorance Concerning Christ's Supremacy!

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the emptiness of their mind...Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in

them, because of the blindness of their heart...but ye have not so learned Christ..." (Ephesians 4:17–20)

Paul is addressing Ephesian Christians, warning them not to live empty, confused lives. He makes it very clear that the emptiness and darkness in them was not caused by demonic activity, but rather it was the result of ignorance concerning God's great provision for them. They had not learned the supremacy of Christ.

Paul said, "Ye did not learn Christ that way." In other words, "I taught an all-sufficient, all-powerful, complete Christ." Yet how few of them comprehended it. Many were still being tossed about by every wind and wave of doctrine; some were still giving place to the devil; others had bitterness and malice; some were involved in fornication, covetousness and all manner of uncleanness. We know this is true because Paul had to warn them against these very things.

Think of the multitudes of Christians today who live defeated, demoralized and broken in body, mind, and spirit. They confess that Christ is their Lord; still they are empty, fearful, and tentative. They have no joy, no spark, no exuberance in the Lord.

Is it because the devil has gained power? Have the demon powers invaded the kingdom of almighty God? Have the principalities and powers of darkness succeeded in deceiving God's elect? I say no. The darkness is in our own minds. It is the result of our own spiritual blindness because we have not opened our hearts to the knowledge of the supremacy of Christ. We are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in us. We have before us a Bible filled with glorious truth about God's dominion and fullness invested in Jesus Christ, but we never do comprehend it, let alone appropriate it. It is not what satan is doing to or in us, but rather what we have refused to believe about Christ.

We should spend all our study time searching out what the Word declares about Christ's victory, his glory, His absolute power and authority. Otherwise we can end up as experts on satan's power and still be alienated from the life of God through ignorance of Christ's supremacy.

That is why Paul focused on no other truth but the lordship and dominion of Christ. He said, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power..." (Ephesians 1:17–19)

We do not need a new revelation about satan's power, we do not need to study darkness or demons. I believe as Paul did, that we desperately need a new and liberating revelation of the riches of Christ, the glory of Christ, the greatness of His power, His absolute dominion over all. We will never be ignorant of satan's devices when our eyes have been opened to the supremacy of Christ. By learning of Christ's dominion, we more easily recognize the weakness of the enemy. Are you seeking the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, or of another?

Christ Is Supreme Because He Cast Down Satan and Every Other High Thing That Exalted Itself Against Him!

"And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it..." (Colossians 2:15).

"...Now shall the prince of this world be cast out..." (John 12:31).

"...That through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil..." (Hebrews 2:9–17).

Christ destroyed the power of the devil. The Greek word here means "to make of none effect" or "useless." Why should any Christian be nervous or intimidated by the fictitious powers of the one who has been stripped and made totally ineffectual? Christ has drained satan of all power — He has cast him down and held him up to open shame.

The "god of this world" has been crippled, and we dare not overestimate his power. The children of the Lord are not of this world. They are not under any dominion from sin or satan. Christ took from satan the keys of death and delivered us from the bondage of the fear of it. Now, through the victory of the Cross we fear neither death, sin, nor the devil. Our glorified Christ declared, "I have the keys of death and hell" (Revelation 1:18).

It is time to look at satan as God sees him — defeated, useless, without power or strength. Satan fell as lightning

from the heavens and he has never regained power. When we recognize that the flesh is his ally, we will spend more time seeking the power of the Cross to effect victory in those areas and less time occupied with demonic activity. We hate to admit that our flesh is inherently evil and capable of gross sins. It is far less humiliating to blame it on demon activity.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your own lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1)

I fear that many well-meaning people are attributing power to the devil that he never claimed for himself. Satan is not omnipresent (everywhere at the same time). No created being has ever been so deified. He did not have that power when he was the anointed cherub. Did he gain such power after being cast down? No!

I, for one, prefer to speak of the supremacy of Christ and the total defeat of satan. The Spirit-filled Christian can say with Christ, "Satan cometh and hath nothing in me." Christ is not locked into a deadly struggle with satan. The war was won at the Cross. Our adversary, the devil, is a dethroned adversary. To suggest that a dethroned power can inhabit a temple of the Holy Ghost is unthinkable to me. The Blood of Christ has never lost its power, and satan will never be able to cross that line.

Others may choose to engage in a war with satan, but as for me, I have claimed the victory of the Cross and have reckoned my flesh dead by faith in His resurrection power. Now, by faith I am seated in a heavenly place with Christ Jesus where no devil or demon dare enter. It is all a matter of revelation. It is a matter of understanding the victory of the Cross and our Lord's supremacy over satan. I believe it when the Lord tells me that no weapon formed against me shall prosper; that I am more than a conqueror; that I am free from the fear of the enemy, even death itself; that I have entered through the veil which is His flesh through which no demon can follow; that I am a member of His body with His life flowing through me; that God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit have made their abode in me — and having done such, no demon power would dare seek entrance; that the Holy Spirit has come upon me, giving me power over all the power of the enemy; that I am in the Father's hand, a place no demon could share; that the light in me has dispelled all darkness; that no principality or power can separated me from the love of God; and best of all that no demon or devil or dominion or power can come anywhere near a cleansed, blood-washed, Spirit-filled, resurrected, heavenly man who is seated at the right hand of the Father. Could God possibly provide any better protection than this?

We had better get back to the Cross quickly and open our eyes to the supremacy of Christ. Otherwise, we will be ministering death rather than life.

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