

Famine in the Land



David Wilkerson April 1, 1983

"And there shall be famines, and troubles, and these are the beginning of sorrows..." (Mark 13:8).

There is a terrible famine raging in the land today. It's not a food famine. In fact, the United States has been producing such an overabundance of food the government is currently devising a number of incentives for farmers to take some of their land out of production.

It's not a famine of the Word of God, the kind mentioned by the prophet Amos. Never in all of church history has there been such a full revelation of the Word of God. Prophets, young and old alike, are being raised up, bringing true revelation to our hearts.

The famine is one of human need. It is the multitudes of people who are are starving for love and affection, longing to be fulfilled and needed by somebody.

The word famine actually means "extreme scarcity, unfulfilled hunger, starvation of any kind." That pretty well sums up the terror so many are experiencing in these last days.

I recently witnessed that terror firsthand at a hotel in Dallas, Texas, where a singles banquet was underway. I watched the guests as they mingled, cocktail glasses in hand, and thought how lonely they looked — such starved, pinched faces; such empty eyes. Later that evening I went down to the sandwich shop for a bite to eat. The party was just breaking up. I saw them coming out, and it broke my heart. Those people had been drinking and partying for four hours, searching for something to give life meaning. And there was an emptiness, a look of genuine terror in their eyes. It was the terror of loneliness, and it was saying, "I don't want to be alone! Please, somebody, help me make it through the night!"

This scene is being repeated all across America. Absolute fear and terror of famine; thousands starving for something they can't even put their finger on. It's never been quite like this before. Drive by any restaurant with a "Happy Hour". From 4 to 7 every day, it will be jammed with lonely people who have just made it through the day. They drink to make it until dinner. Then after dinner, they head back to some bar. They are searching — seeking — trying to find something to satisfy the famine of their soul.

Not only will you witness this desperation in the bars; you can see it in congregations as well. I've stood outside churches and watched the faces of people as they file in. I think the greatest grief in my ministry is to listen to the untold tragic stories of God-fearing, dedicated Christians who are lonely and hurting. Most often they are singles. They come to me and say something like this: "David, what's so wrong with wanting to be loved? There's nothing sinful about it, is there? Just to be needed? I'm not looking for sex; I'm looking for a friend, someone to share with."

One lady wrote the following note: "Am I condemned to a life of loneliness? Am I not worth anything to anybody anymore? The nights terrify me. I love God; I'm full of Christ, and I love Him. But on the human level I hurt so much I can't sleep. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth it! When I go to church and see other people happily married, it really hurts. Am I doomed to live like this the rest of my life? Will my needs never be met?"

Then I get letters from married people who are locked into a hopeless, loveless marriage. Some with a husband or wife who cheats on them; others with a homosexual mate; or those with a spouse who is little more than a stranger to them. They say, "You talk about loneliness — single people don't know what loneliness is! You can't know, until you are in a position where everyone thinks you're happy and have everything in order. You put on a front, and they don't know that the worst kind of loneliness can be when you're locked in with somebody in your house who doesn't love you!"

I listened to story after story, and I wept. I prayed for the Lord to give me His answer to this famine of loneliness. I didn't want any psychiatric theories — no Freud or Jung. So I went to the Word of God and found the heart cry of the Lord.

Let me share some beautiful truth with you. If you are hurting, if you are in the midst of personal famine, God has an assuring word for you. I'm not just talking about love per se. I'm talking about the sense of being needed and fulfilled.

Consider Joseph.

The Lord led me to the story of Joseph. Joseph saw his beautiful dream come tumbling down, and what a dream it was! He dreamed that his sheaf stood, and all the others bowed down. That even the stars and the moon fell down before him! It meant he was going to reach the very top of fulfillment, the pinnacle of success. I don't know of any other man in the world who has dreamed a dream like that!

When I speak of "reaching the top", I'm talking about joy, peace, personal fulfillment. Not material things — because they do not satisfy. That's not a dream: that's fantasy. Not reality. The real dream has to do with joy and fulfillment, and feeling needed.

If you study Joseph's story, you see that for awhile everything went fine. His dream started unfolding right before his eyes. He loved working for his master. Everything he did prospered; he was in control of his destiny. Happy, blessed, needed, respected, and loved. But suddenly, it all came crashing down on his head. Just when his dream seemed to be coming into focus and he was experiencing the kind of happiness he thought life should bring, disaster struck:

"Joseph's master took him, and put him in prison...a place where the king's prisoner's were bound..." (Genesis 39:20)

The irony was that he was thrown into this predicament for not compromising! This was not a result of sin. It was because he would not give in to his master's wife and commit adultery with her. One day, he was in control and everybody respected him. The next day, he was tied up and bound in a dark dungeon of despair!

Now when Joseph went to prison, God was still with him. The Bible says that everything he did there also prospered (Genesis 39:23). But what a trial for this man of God! He had a dream in his heart. He evidently was a man of great need and great hunger because he couldn't have reached such heights unless he was driven by these needs. He was capable, talented — but now sat wasting in prison, wondering if the door of usefulness would even open to him again.

The account continues,

"...until the time that his word came, [the word of his deliverance]...the word of God tried him..." (Psalm 105:19).

If you had been with Joseph in that prison, during those long months of agony, remembering the dream, you would understand his desperation. Keep in mind that the dream had to do with godly, spiritual things. Joseph had a dream to be useful — needed!

Isn't that what we all really want? To be useful? Isn't that the cry of our heart: "God, am I not worth something to you? Can't I be used? Is there no place for me? Nothing for me to do?"

It was the cry of Joseph's heart as he sat, apparently forgotten, in prison. If we had been with him, I think we would have overheard him saying, "It's not that I don't believe God is real, or that I don't believe His Word. I do. And I love Him. But I need some evidence that He's there — that my prayers are being heard. I go on week after week in the same dungeon of despair. Nothing changes. God, please do something — anything — to get me out of this terrible

predicament I'm in!"

Does that have a familiar ring? Does the Word of God try you? You pick up your Bible and read the promises, and they seem to taunt you. Prayers for deliverance go unanswered. Oh, what a test for this great man of God! You see, God still loved Joseph; He was still with him. But on the human level, this servant of God was in great pain and distress. Oh, how he did hurt!

Needed — a Friend!

The butler and baker had also been thrown in jail. They both had a dream, which they asked Joseph to interpret. Joseph told the butler, "You're going to get your job back — you're going to be restored to your former position!" Then listen to what Joseph told him:

"Get me out, for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews...and I have done nothing that I should be in this place..." (Genesis 40:14, 15).

Doesn't your heart go out to Joseph? An ungodly man gets out of trouble, while the man of God who truly believes is left behind in bondage. It didn't seem fair. He is left in prison; his dream destroyed; lonely and hurt. And worst of all, he didn't even know why it was happening to him! Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever cried out in desperation, "Somebody, anywhere! Is there anyone who can feel what I'm feeling? Help me! God, I want out!" And it seems all the worse when others who are less deserving have things going right for them.

Two more years went by while Joseph languished in that dark hole of despair. Can you imagine how forgotten he felt? Those he had hoped would help, gave up on him. He had no friend to talk to, to share his deep hurt and loneliness. His family was not around to help him. The Word of God was testing his heart. Your heart goes out to this holy man of God as he reaches out for a human touch, trying to comprehend why he was not being delivered.

I believe there are many Christians today who can honestly say, "I really don't think I deserve the circumstances I am going through right now. Not this kind of despair!" Like Joseph, they are innocent, and are suffering through a severe trial.

What About the Guilty?

But maybe you're not innocent. Perhaps you are the one who did the injury to another. You are the one who made the mistake. You say, "It's all right for you to talk about the love of Jesus for a man like Joseph, who could say honestly, 'I'm suffering for no just cause.' Anyone can offer hope to that kind of person. But I deserve what I'm going through. It's all my fault I'm in this mess! I failed God and hurt a lot of people."

Most of the time the church doesn't have much patience with the one who is in the wrong — such as the man who runs off and leaves his family, and commits adultery. We despise that man. When the Ayotollah placed our American citizens under house arrest, how many Americans believed that Jesus loved the Iranians? How many of us would have sent our sons or daughters to Iran as missionaries? Instead, we wanted God to call fire out of heaven and consume them! We didn't feel much love or compassion.

Let me tell you something that is hard for us to accept: If a guilty one repents, humbles himself, and is broken before God — he has as much right to the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ as those he has injured.

In the Old Testament Jeremiah speaks of people sick with famine — an inner starvation. They look for peace, but all they find is trouble; for a time of healing and release from their problems, but all they find is no good. There is terror both in their mind, and in their spirit, and in their body:

"...our skin is black like an oven because of the terror of our famine..." (Lamentations 5:10).

Anyone going through the loneliness of guilt will tell you what it's like to feel suffocated, to feel their soul is drying up and turning black with despair. Absolute terror in their heart! I can't begin to estimate how many have cried about this guilt at the altars in my crusades. They tell me they can't sleep at night. They say, "It's not that I'm afraid I won't be ready when Jesus comes — it's on this human level that I'm terrified! I've brought upon myself such fear and loneliness."

Some weep over abortions, unable to cope with overwhelming guilt. They cry out, "I murdered my baby. I took an innocent life — can God ever forgive me?" One poor girl was on the verge of a nervous breakdown after having

three abortions. She was overcome with a godly sorrow, yet hysterical with guilt. There was no peace in her troubled mind, and she felt such emptiness and dissatisfaction.
Our Sins Do Catch Up With Us.

There are times when God sends arrows of famine against the disobedient and rebellious. Ezekiel spoke in God's behalf to the disobedient children of Israel, who were defiling the temple of God by marrying heathen wives. Living in open, flaunted sin! Ezekiel, under the thunder of God's anointing, cried out,

"God will execute judgment on you, in anger and fury and furious rebukes...he will send upon you evil arrows of famine...the famine will increase day by day...Your sins have brought this on you, and when you sin, you must pay for the mistake!" (Ezekiel 5)

Many of you are paying for a terrible mistake you made. You can go ahead and try to pull something over God's eyes, but you're going to reap what you sow. There's no question about it:

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap..." (Galatians 6:7)

Many are in the midst of depression. They are down, lonely — because they made a mistake and they are paying for it — dearly. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." And the misery, pain and rejection we feel, is because somewhere down along the line we failed God. We were disobedient, stubborn, and self-willed. And the cost of disobedience is very high.

But I have good news for you! God has been opening my eyes in the past few months to His great marvelous love and His power of reconciliation. Sometimes I can hardly contain it!

There is a beautiful truth in Ezekiel, in the same passage where God is shooting arrows of famine against wrongdoers. Ezekiel tells the people in essence, "It's not that God is doing it; rather, this is the consequence of what you are doing! If you go ahead in your own way after I have loved and begged and pleaded, you will pay the price. You are going to have loneliness and fear, because that is the natural consequence of your sin!"

It's not that God purposely hurts people. But you are paying the natural consequences of sin. Yet listen to this glorious word:

"Oh, house of Israel [God's people], you were defiled by your own ways, doing your own things, so unclean that I had to pour out my wrath on you. But I have pity on you, for my holy name's sake...not for your sake...not because you deserve it, but because my name is holy, and I can be merciful on whom I choose to be merciful. I have such pity for you..." (Ezekiel 36:17ff).

When God Speaks of "pity" — that's not sorrow. No! Because whom God pities, He rectifies. He doesn't pity anyone without doing something about it. He never wastes His pity. He always remedies those He pities:

"...I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your filthiness...I will also give you a new heart, and a new spirit...I will give you a heart of flesh, and you shall no more carry your reproach of famine..." (Ezekiel 36:25–30).

I believe there are some people who won't repent and come back to God because they think they have sinned too grievously, and God can't forgive them. I have had hundreds tell me over the years, "If you only knew what I did!" They feel their life has been absolutely demolished. Their dream is gone, dead! But God says to them, "I have seen all you've been doing, and I still pity you. I can sprinkle you with clean water; I can give you a new spirit and a new heart. I will make you a new man — start you over as though it never happened."

We serve a God like that! Think of it! The pity of God for hurting people — including those who do the wrong! You don't have to go through life paying for your mistakes. If you are doing that, you don't believe that He paid for your sins. Why did Christ go to the Cross? To pay for our mistakes — if we repent and forsake them, and are willing to come back to His gracious love.

There Is a Way Out of the Famine.

Often, the more complicated a truth sounds, the less truth it is! The thing that makes the Gospel so profound is its simplicity. So often we go all over, looking for a way out. We run to people; we pick up the telephone; we read

books and listen to tapes. We become desperate in our alarm and terror, reaching out in all directions. Then, when we do hear the answer, it's so simple — we don't get it!

It would be a good idea to put away all the Christian psychology books and tapes and records for awhile, and just focus on one simple word. The way out of the prison you are in comes down to just one word.

There is a simple, biblical way out — Hope!

I have been searching for years for a simple solution to the deep problem of loneliness and depression. Sometimes, after a citywide crusade, I'd go home and punch my fist in the pillow, weeping over the many needs of hurting people, I couldn't even process all the problems I had heard; my head was swimming. I would pray, "Oh, God, there are so many problems, so many hurting people! Lord, is there really an answer for everybody? Or is it like Zerephath — so many starving, suffering people, and relief given to only two (1 Kings 17).

But that is the Old Testament. Under the New Testament, it doesn't work that way. In the New Testament, "Whosoever will may come." It's to all who believe. God doesn't exclude anyone. It's not that He cut anybody out in the Old Testament — but Israel had become so dark, only two people could see the light! Now we have all been given the glorious light; it's been shed abroad. God is no respecter of persons; He has no favorites. This glorious hope is for every person who is lonely; for anyone who is seeking love or has a need. That need can be met! God won't exclude anybody!

I asked the Lord to show me what this word hope means.

There are five things I want to share:

1. Hope — is the knowledge that what you need is possible.

It is a growing inner faith that what you need is possible. I have boiled it down to this: what is possible with God? And that leaves us no excuse — because we know "all things are possible with God." You're not going to have any faith if you don't believe it is possible for God to turn your life around and start you over again; turn your tears into joy — and open up a whole new world to you. If you don't believe that it is possible, you might as well drop out of the struggle and give up. You can't go on. This is what hope is: to be able to say, "I believe in my heart that what I need in Christ is possible."

2. Hope — is the assurance that all things will turn out to my good in God's time.

What does the Scripture say?

"All things work together for good to them who love God and are the called according to his purpose..." (Romans 8:28).

Perhaps you think you're one of those chosen people, doomed to despair; God has picked you out to suffer despair and loneliness. You think the heavens are shut to you, His promises null and void. That's not what God's Word says — Idare you to show me that in the Scripture! God has promised to do right by you, in His time, in His way. It will be perfect when it comes.

3. Hope — is an absolute conviction and insistence that the solution is already on the way.

"Until his time came, the Word of God tried him..."

Aren't you glad for that word "until"? That means your deliverance is coming! What you are going through right now is the "until". Don't think it's strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as if you were going through some strange thing (1 Peter 4:12). There is nothing you can tell me that I haven't heard a dozen times! You may suffer in a very special way; but Christ said that all temptations are common to all men. Yours is not unique. There are many in the same boat with you.

This word hope means that you believe God has already started working. he's doing things you can't see, but you say with confidence. "God, you are working things out. You're going to do it — and do it right!"

4. Hope — is a confidence in the face of no visible evidence.

This is the confidence which says, "I don't see it yet, but I'm going to start thanking and praising God now. I know that in my hour of trial, He has already made provisions for me." It's also a complete trust that in spite of all the odds, God is going to work in your behalf. It's not a flimsy hope — but one built on a sure foundation. Look at what God promises He will do:

- God is going to hold you steady as long as this ordeal lasts.

You are not going to fall. You won't have a nervous breakdown or lose your mind. Listen to what the psalmist says:
- "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and keep them alive in their famine..." (Psalm 33:18,19).

God tells you He will keep you alive as long as the famine lasts. Now you tell that to the devil, too!
- You are going to experience abundant divine satisfaction until you reach the human satisfaction you need.

God is going to maintain your divine satisfaction:

"The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; they shall not be ashamed in their hard times...and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied...though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down..." (Psalm 37:18,19,24)

The Lord is going to uphold you with His hand — through everything! You will be given a divine, godly satisfaction that will be far more glorious than all human needs.
- Not for one minute will you be out of His will, out of His sight, or out of His love.
"The Lord forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved forever...none of their steps shall slide..." (Psalm 37:28,31).

Did you know He will even make your bed in your trial!

"The Lord will strengthen you upon the bed of languishing; he will make your bed in your sickness [suffering]..." (Psalm 41:3).

He says to you, "Lie down; leave it to me."
- Your day of deliverance is coming if you will just keep your hope steadfast in His Word.

Don't hope in men; don't hope in yourself. Trust only in the Word of God:

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why are you so disturbed inwardly? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance..." (Psalm 42:5).

"Wait on the Lord, keep his way, and he shall exalt you to inherit..." (Psalm 37:34).

That means He is going to make you come into the promise! He will cause you to inherit!

5. Here is the flagship of hope — the blessed hope of deliverance out of all the despair in you heart:

Memorize this reference, Romans 8:35–39:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? tribulation? distress? famine?..."

Will that famine you're going through keep you separated from Christ's love? No!

"...for in all things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us..." (Romans 8:37).

Paul said, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present [in other words, the things you are going through right now], nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will ever be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:38,39).

Now if He loves you so much, whatever made you believe He would let you down or fail you? If you are not separated from the love of Christ, how can you be separated from your deliverance? You can't be! You cannot serve the Lord — you cannot come to God's house honestly, without having this hope in you: "God is going to see me through; He's going to deliver me by His power. He is going to do right by me!"

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