

Hope from the Ashes

A man sat in my office a while back, trying to resolve a situation between himself and some of the people in our congregation. It seemed like everyone who entered this man's life became angry at him for one reason or another, and an argument always developed. When I asked him about a dispute with one certain lady, he immediately said, "Let me tell you what really happened." A few minutes later, when I asked about another situation with a certain man, he responded, "That's not the way it happened. Let me explain my side." About forty-five minutes later, after explaining his side of three or four more cases, he asked me, "Why do people get so upset with me?"

I replied, "Because you're always right. No one likes a person who believes he's always right. It irritates most people to find someone who is perfect." I told him that out of all the cases we had just covered, he might be exactly right in two or three, but not in every one. At that moment, some insight from the Holy Spirit rose up in my heart and I changed the subject. "What are you called to do in life? What will you be doing five years from now, or ten years from now?"

"I don't know," he answered glumly.

"Is it because you have never known, or because you used to know and have become disillusioned?"

He began to cry. "I used to be so confident a few years ago. I knew exactly what God had called me to do, but I have failed in so many areas in the years since, that I'm not sure I can hear from God at all." He explained that he used to be secure in his relationship with the Lord and was happier around people then.

The picture now became clear. As long as his relationship with the Lord and his understanding of his calling were on solid ground, he was a pleasure to be around. He could objectively listen to others without feeling threatened. Now that he was not sure of his own however, he became defensive and felt as if he had to justify everything he said and did before others. In his present state, he came to church out of duty and

obligation, and not because of his love for the Lord. He had lost his enthusiasm and had become like so many others in our congregation — believers without hope.

Where there is no vision the people perish.

Proverbs 29:18

What is a vision? *It is our hope! A vision is the goal or dream set before each one of us. It is the target for our life.* Without hope, a goal, we are aimless and without purpose in our Christian life. We have nothing to shoot for. Even though we may have all the faith in the world and know a great number of scriptures, if we have given up hope, these things profit us nothing.

Hope deferred (put away) maketh the heart sick.

Proverbs 13:20

Many times hope is lost because the desires we have had in our hearts have not come to pass when we thought they would. I have had church members tell me that no one ever trusted God more than they did, and yet God did not come through. Whether they want to admit it or not, they are blaming their frustrations and impatience on God.

What we must always remember is that God has never failed any of us and He cannot fail us. It is blasphemous to think God would not fulfill all of His promises. If His promises are not being fulfilled in our lives, the problem is not with God, but with us.

Most likely, we did not really develop our faith and trust in Him by following *His* plan, but we expected Him to back *our* plans and fulfill *our* desires. Or, maybe we set *our* time frame for everything He promised us to happen. Then, when the promises did not come to pass, we felt as if God had let us down. However, if we seek God, find out His plan for our lives, and walk in simple obedience to His Word, eventually we can do nothing but succeed.

Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many

nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

Romans 4:18

A great example for us today is Abraham, a man who lost his hope and regained it after many years. His story begins in Genesis 12:1, when God first told him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and take only his wife, Sarai, with him. He partially obeyed God by leaving his homeland, but he took his father and nephew, Lot, with him.

Abram had been such a successful man in Ur, that it was hard for him to forsake everything that he had. He wanted to obey God, but he also wanted to keep an "ace in the hole" in case God failed. So he brought his father along to insure that he would keep the prosperity and power he had enjoyed in Ur. His disobedience to God's command set him back five years, and bringing Lot with him cost him many more years. Finally, when Abram got to the Promised Land, it did not flow with milk and honey as God had told him. There was a famine in the land, and there was not enough food and water to sustain the tremendous number of people Abram had brought with him.

At this time in his walk with the Lord, Abram was still operating according to his own understanding, and because there was a drought in Canaan, Abram took Sarai and his people to Egypt, where the grass looked greener. It was much later in his life that he learned that God "calls those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:18), and that God could have fed them even in a famine.

Then, in order to save his own life, he gave his wife to the king of Egypt, insisting that she was his sister. Ultimately, God had to intervene to save Sarai's life. Although they were thrown out of Egypt when the king discovered Abram's deceit, Abram was still not through trying to control his own life. He and Sarai tried to fulfill God's promise for a child themselves. They brought back a slave girl from Egypt, and Abram had a son through her. Now all havoc broke loose in the house! It wasn't until Abram put both Hagar and their son, Ishmael, out of the house that he came to the end of himself.

Twenty-four years had passed, and Abram and Sarai were no closer to having

a miracle child than they were in Ur. In fact, it was more impossible now than it had been then, because physically they were very old in years. Abram was perishing without a vision. His heart was sick because his hope had been put away. All of his own plans had failed, and Abram faced a choice. He could remain discouraged, blaming God for his failure, and live out his Christian life in misery until he died; or, he could forget those things which were behind and again find the mark of God's high calling for his life (Philippians 3:13,14). We find in Genesis 17 that Abram chose the latter.

God reconfirmed the covenant with Abram and gave him the same promise He had given in the beginning, "so shall thy seed be" (Genesis 15:6 and 17:7). Abram was not given a new promise, but he received a new revelation of the original promise. His hope, his vision, and his goal were reestablished. Abram's name was changed to Abraham (Father of many nations) and Sarai's name (contentious) was changed to Sarah (princess).

Abraham and Sarah could have had Isaac many years sooner, but the good news is that they did finally have him! Aren't you glad to know that God's promise and will for their lives did not change because of their unbelief and failures, and God's promises do not rise or fall on our successes or failures, either! When Abraham and Sarah decided to put their trust in God, they found His promise that they would have a son just as real and powerful as when they had received it twenty-four years earlier.

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