

“More than Conqueror” or Victim?

There is a lot happening in our nation today. Things that make the heart sink into discouragement and even into despair. First came the pestilence, then the loss of liberty and freedom. Later, came job losses and financial setbacks. Then the disgusting actions of a police officer leading to valid protests over injustice. Then came the rioting, looting, murdering and ungodly selfishness. Now we are listening as some want to abolish the police. It is easy to let this discouragement bleed over into our relationship with God. Yet current events are not the only thing that can lead to despair.

Discouragement is the weakening byproduct of fruitless hard work:

The sad legacy of taking a stand and looking back realizing that no one standing with us.

It is the bitter outcome of great plans cut off or of tasks that cannot be accomplished.

Some of God's greatest servants found themselves in its grip.

First Moses said *“I am not able”* then *“the burden is too heavy for me”* and finally *“please kill me here and now”* (Num. 11:14-15).

Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' 14 I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now — if I have found favor in Your sight — and do not let me see my wretchedness!” Num 11:13-15

On the one hand we could compliment Moses in taking seriously his role as deliverer and lawgiver, but on the other hand we could fault Moses for not having enough faith in God. God saw this as a legitimate concern and gave him 70 men to help with the burden and quail to feed the people.

After the great victory over the 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah believed *“I alone am left; and therefore “prayed that he might die”* since *“they seek to take my life”* (1Kings 19:4). This is what discouragement does. In case, God blessed Elijah with words of comfort, but it also gives us a warning. So many times there are things we don't know.

Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” 1 Kings 19:18

One of the stirring moments in the Scriptures that helps illustrate Jesus own words in the garden.

there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” 16 So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” 17 And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:15-18

Yet, with all these things, in the midst of productive useful lives, we can still become discouraged. Often because we see very few tangible results. All Noah's efforts saved only his own family.

After several years of hard and productive labor, John the Baptist found himself languishing in prison. Even though he had heard God say, *“this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,”* his disappointment is evident in his question to Jesus. *“Are you really the coming one or should we look for another”* (Lk. 7:19-23)? Jesus was firm and clear. *“Go and tell John ... blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”* Though *“among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist”* (Mt. 11:7), discouragement brought him near to being offended (or stumbled) over Jesus plans.

Jesus knew that the results of His labor would end in His death. He had no discouragement because He accepted failure as a part of the plan for His life that would lead to victory. Even the lack of growth and weaknesses on the part of His disciples He simply took in stride.

A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. 4 He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law.” Isa. 42:3-4

Remember Isaiah who boldly said *“here am I send me,”* yet after asking *“Lord, how long?”* was told *“until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate”* (Isa 6:11). If Isaiah had hoped to make a difference he learned it was not to be.

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” 9 And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ ... 11 Then I said, “Lord, how long?” And He answered: “Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate, Isa. 6:8-9

God later told Ezekiel what the real problem was. *“Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ... But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted”* (Ezek. 3:4,7). *“Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them”* (Ezek. 33:32).

Jeremiah had great issues with discouragement in his youth, but as he grew to maturity, he began to see the truth. We must serve God in whatever generation we are born. Results are unimportant. This is clearly seen in God's words to Jeremiah's servant Baruch:

“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 3 'You said, “Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.”' 4 “Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says

the Lord: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. 5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the Lord. "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go." Jer. 45:2-5

Paul faced similar circumstances. He had "great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart" (Rom. 9:3), because he could not help Israel. He remained above discouragement by reminding himself:

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" 1Cor. 3:6-7

It hurt him that he could not help, but he did not take it personally. At the end of his life, his focus was on his effort, not the results.

"I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" 2Tim. 1:12; 4:7

As we join God in working out His eternal purpose, we must learn to leave the results to God and simply keep working, even when it seems fruitless and hopeless. There is nothing we can do about results. What others do as a result of our effort is beyond our control. We must resist the temptation to blame ourselves.

Our Lord has lost many servants, elders, teachers, and preachers because of discouragement. He warned us that such things are part of our walk with him. There will be "many tribulations" (Acts 14:22) and those who endure are blessed (Mt. 5:10-12), yet sometimes they strike with such force, so close together, or from such an unexpected source, we are overwhelmed. The joy that should ease such anguish (Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:3-5) is quenched.

Satan knows a serious setback at the right moment or in clusters can lead even the best of God's servants to a discouragement (Job 1:9-11). Yet Paul spoke with great confidence. Regardless of the difficulties we face we will always be "more than conquerors." "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward" and "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:18; 8:31-38)

Since we are "more than conquerors," victory is assured. "Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ" for since "God is for us who can be against us?" We are "more than conquerors" over "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Can we feel this confidence? Since we are victors, how can we be victims?

We must never forget that there is a difference between a discouragement that is borne, prayed about and overcome and a discouragement that leads to unfaithfulness or a weariness that keeps us from doing all that God needs us to do.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 37 "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Heb 11:35-39

When the ten spies returned from the promised land they saw only obstacles.

we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." Num 13:33

when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them. 10 So the Lord's anger was aroused on that day, and He swore an oath, saying, Num 32:8-11

No trial or loss is worthy to be compared to the glory God will give us at the end of this life! From Noah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel we learn that even years of seemingly fruitless effort will be rewarded if we remain faithful. It is this faith that **protects** us from all *fiery darts of the evil one* (Eph. 6:16). God did not fault the one talent man for his lack of results. Only for his lack of effort.

Discouragements will come into our lives. When setbacks arise and there is no solution, we will become discouraged and disappointed. From all the above, it is clear that God is compassionate and full of pity. But if it becomes a settled manner of life, He sees it as lack of faith in Him.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; Heb 12:3-5

Job, Jeremiah, Moses and Elijah reveal the danger and damage discouragement can create. The very moment we think the words: "**it's not fair**" we make ourselves a victim. The instant we feel begin to **feel sorry for ourselves**, victory can slip from our grasp. The moment we believe our efforts are fruitless, alarms should be warning us. We cannot be "more than conquerors" when we feel cheated or beaten down! We cannot "count it all joy" in every tribulation when struggling with self-pity.

If we are to "run with patience the race set before us" we have to lay aside all the "weights" and ask God for the wisdom to view them with joy (James 1:2-8). We can only do this as long as we are the victor. If we are feeling like a victim, Pray and remember the prophets. Heb 10:35-39