

UHPC WORSHIP--- OCT. 06, 2019

SERMON TOPIC: "PRESSING OUT OF DESPAIR INTO HOPE"

Scripture tells us that where there is no vision, the people perish. Why is that? When there is nothing to live for or future to look forward to, people tend to lose hope and become discouraged, distressed, and depressed. A catastrophe like 9/11 can create a heaviness over an entire nation and there is fear and confusion in the lives of people. The human spirit feels what other animals cannot and do not feel; and there is an involuntary response. Therefore, there needs to be a remedy to help such situations. So, I ask the question: When we find ourselves in despair, distress, struggling for fresh air (so to speak,)-- HOW DO WE COME UP OUT OF IT? THERE HAS TO BE A WAY OUT FOR THE HUMAN SOUL TO BE RESTORED TO LIFE, HEALTH, AND PEACE. We should know that the medical doctor can only treat the body but he/she cannot heal the soul. The Psychiatrist may help with counseling to some degree of success, but still cannot guarantee wholeness.

We hear Jeremiah speaking in Lamentation 3 about his many afflictions and homelessness during the time of the Babylonian exile. He spoke of bitterness of soul as of wormwood and gall. Why was he feeling this way? Well, Babylon had demolished Jerusalem and taken away most of the brightest people, priests, prophets, and other leaders into exile. They wanted to use their skills, intellect, and expertise to improve and enhance their own country. Jeremiah was left alone to be one of the few, if not the only connection between those in exile and Jehovah, their God. He needed something to hold on to in order to survive this horrible separation and destruction. It felt like wormwood and tasted like gall to him. HE NEEDED HOPE. *He grieved saying that his soul was bereft of peace. Gone was his happiness and his Glory. His soul continually was thinking of the Babylonian exile and was grieved and bowed down.* **But then he remembered something.** Jeremiah remembered that "God's MERCIES HAVE NO END. THEY ARE NEW EVERY MORNING; GREAT IS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS. THE LORD IS HIS PORTION, SAYS HIS SOUL, THEREFORE, HE WOULD HOPE IN GOD." (Let us tell ourselves these same words Jeremiah spoke.) I encourage us to write this down (Lam. 3: 21-23) and consider it when you are feeling down and discouraged. ---***God's mercies have no end. They***

are new every morning. --WHY BOTHER? --Because God's Word has the power to heal, to encourage, to strengthen, and to edify plus more. It can do what silver and gold cannot do. It can do what food and drink cannot do. We may not understand how it works except to say that—IT IS GOD'S HOLY WORD AND IT CANNOT LIE. IT CANNOT RETURN VOID BUT MUST ACCOMPLISH WHAT IT WAS DESIGNED AND SENT TO DO.

We hear in Psalm 137 how grieved, distressed, and hurt the Israelites were as they were being led away to Babylon: They grieved saying: *"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps on the willows there, for there our captors and tormenters required of us songs of mirth. ... (But) How could we sing the songs of the LORD in a foreign land?"* They vowed never to forget Jerusalem—their chief joy. They were down in the dumps. (--so to speak) -But how long could or should they stay there? THEY WOULD HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO PRESS THROUGH AND TO PRESS PAST THEIR SORROW, PAIN, AND DISTRESS TO FIND LIFE AND HOPE IN A NEW PLACE. Could it be that their captors noticed how distressed and weak they had become on that horrible journey-- and thought—"Maybe what these people need is some cheering up?" Could it be that the captors felt that if they allowed them to sing some of their familiar songs of Zion, they might gather some strength for the journey? The Scripture does not say so, but this is quite a possibility. However, these captives could not muster up a song. In fact, they wanted vengeance against their captors. Most of us, I think, could identify with these feelings and can empathize with anyone who is in distress, grief, pain, abandonment, or oppression of any kind. It seems normal to feel this way. Yet, the Bible tells us in Nehemiah 8, that "the joy of the LORD is our strength." It tells us that we are to encourage ourselves and one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. WHAT DID THESE PEOPLE NEED MOST AT THIS TIME AND UNDER SUCH SITUATIONS? They needed joy and they needed hope. They needed a vision for the future.

Even when you may feel like you are in exile or alone, it might help to sing the songs of Zion for they will lift your spirit. Know that the "joy of the LORD is your strength so sing: Great is Thy Faithfulness, O LORD!" Sing: "New every morning is Thy love..." Sing to the LORD a new song... Sing unto the LORD all the earth..." etc. This is one way of PRESSING OUR WAY OUT OF HOPELESSNESS AND DESPAIR. --Read the "Hallelujah and Praise Psalms." --Play some music if

you know how, or even hit the tambourine. –Watch a comedy show and laugh out loud... for laughter is the best medicine they say. –Go out for some physical exercise. ---Do a puzzle or something mentally stimulating. –Do a service to someone in need. ---Pray, worship, and fellowship with other believers, put on a garment of praise and take off the spirit of heaviness. This might take self-awareness and require conscious effort.

When the weight of the world bears down so heavily, and the sweat is pouring down our brows, the song says: There is sweet relief in knowing that the Lord will make a way somehow. WE NEED TO PRESS OUR WAY OUT OF DESPAIR INTO HOPE. Hope may not just come voluntarily. Sometimes we need to apply the principles given to us in the Bible. We need to understand that if we don't come out from under depression, distress, and despair, we are likely to sink even deeper. IF WE GET OUR HOPE RESTORED, WE WILL HAVE LIFE, PEACE, AND HEALTH RESTORED. Though we might have to walk through dark valleys, if we have God with us, we need not be afraid, for Jesus our Good Shepherd will lead us out into green pastures and by still waters. BUT WE WILL NEED TO TRUST AND NOT LOSE HOPE... EVEN A FLICKER OF HOPE IS HELPFUL.

Paul tells us in Romans 5: 1-5 Those who are justified by faith have peace with God through the Blood of Christ who gives us access to GRACE. As a result, we can boast in sharing, not only in His suffering, but also in His GLORY. By learning endurance we build character, and through character we develop a strength of HOPE. According to Paul, HOPE does not disappoint because the love of God is poured into us by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, through the Blood of Christ we have been justified and we have received reconciliation with the Father. THIS IS WHERE WE NEED TO BE SETTLED IN CONFIDENCE, FAITH, AND HOPE. We can ask the Holy Spirit whose love is poured out in our hearts to restore our hope and point us to a vision for our future. Let us be determined to encourage ourselves to worship our way out of despair, out of the valley of Baca and make it a place of refreshing springs of flowing waters. David asked in Psalm 42:5—“Why are you cast down, o my Soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Then he told his soul to: “Hope in God for I shall yet praise Him, my Help and my God.”

LET ME ASK US: Is there anything oppressing anyone here today? Is there a spirit of sadness pressing down on your soul? What or whom seems to be stealing your joy? Try to think on those things that are uplifting, praise-worthy, lovely, of good report... **Repeat to yourselves: *The LORD is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His steadfast love endures forever. ...New every morning is Your love; our waking and uprising prove. Through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life, and power, and thought. New mercies each returning day, hover around us while we pray. New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven...***LET US PRESS OUR WAY OUT OF DESPAIR INTO NEW HOPE, NEW LIFE, NEW RELATIONSHIPS, NEW STRENGTH, NEW CAREERS... PUSH THROUGH THE DARKNESS, THE FEAR, THE DISCOURAGEMENT, DISAPPOINTMENTS, ETC. COME INTO GOD'S MARVELOUS LIGHT AND ABIDE IN GOD'S PRESENCE IN ETERNAL HOPE THROUGH FAITH IN THE RISEN CHRIST JESUS, HIS ASCENSION, AND HIS COMING AGAIN.

AMEN.

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