

The Refiner's Fire ***Indestructible Hope***

Lesson #7 for November 17, 2007

Scriptures: Job 38-41; Isaiah 41: 8-14; Jeremiah 29:1-10; Habakkuk 1:1-11; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Hebrews 12:1-13.

1. What is the basis for the Christian's hope? Why is hope important? What is the Christian's ultimate hope? Does discipline destroy hope? Do we discourage our children when we discipline them?
2. Romans 8:24,25 says: ²⁴**For it was by hope that we were saved**; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For which of us hopes for something we see? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (*GNB*)

Martin Luther was so stuck on the idea—supported well in other parts of Scripture—that we are saved “by faith alone” that he could not accept this verse as it reads. So, he changed it to say, “For it was by faith that we were saved, albeit in an attitude of hope....”
3. At the end of the famous “love” chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul in verse 13 (*GNB*) said, “Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.” We talk a great deal about faith and love, but we do not speak much about hope. Why not? What is the essential nature of hope? Why is it important for Christians?
4. What does it take to have hope? Do you need to be in a comfortable environment? Do you need smiling people all around you? Or is it only important that you see that things *may* get better in the future? Are all of our hopes realistic?
5. Habakkuk lived in Jerusalem at a time when things were going from bad to worse. The poor and common people were being oppressed, and the nations, notably Assyria, surrounding Israel and Judah were getting ready to attack. Habakkuk cried out to God, “What is happening to us?” And God's remarkable answer was that Babylon—not Assyria—was coming! Things were going to get a lot worse before they got better. How can there be any hope in that? But isn't that where we find ourselves as well? The world around us is in bad shape, and we have reason to believe that there is a real time of trouble coming before Christ's return. The only thing that brings hope is God's promise to help us through it.
6. If we are holding on to God's promises and nothing else, is that holding on to false hope? Does “the crucible” have anything to do with hope?
7. Read Romans 5:3-5. Paul has a very interesting sequence in that verse. He suggested that troubles will lead to endurance, which will lead to God's approval, which will lead to hope. Does that sequence seem logical to you? How does that actually work?
8. So often we cry out to God for an immediate solution to our problems, but God might say, “You must wait. There is a much more important, much better answer coming later.” That does not mean that God has somehow forsaken us! And it does not mean that we should turn away from God—as the core of our hope—to other people, especially when we know that they are often unreliable.
9. **But let us be honest! The reason Jesus has not come before now is that we are not ready! Do you think you would—or even could—survive a real time of trouble? How do you respond when God seems not to answer your prayers and/or pleas?**
10. Have you ever felt that God was working against you? When you do not immediately get the

answer you want, do you feel abandoned?

11. Remember the experience of Jacob and his nighttime “fight.” And what about Job? What about Habakkuk? Did those people deserve what happened to them?
12. Read Isaiah 41:13. Is it possible that the great God of the universe—who is locked in a deadly “battle” with Satan in “the great controversy”—has time to care about you and me individually? Does God actually need us in order to win “the great controversy”? Are we important to Him? If so, why?
13. What are the differences between faith and hope? What would you say is the real basis for the Christian’s hope? Is it important for us to exercise hope no matter what happens?
14. Often we, in effect, ask God to tell us what His future plans are. Usually, He does not tell us. We have some broad outlines about what is coming but nothing in detail. So what is the basis for our hope? We sing, “I know who holds the future, and I know He holds my hand.” Should Christians feel comfortable as long as they are holding God’s hand?
15. Consider the case of Job. Read Job 38-41. After Job had repeatedly responded to the accusations of his friends, and they had tried in every possible way to get him to admit what they believed was his guilt, God stepped in and asked a whole list of incredible questions. What was His point? Was God rebuking Job? Or was God saying, “I have been able to create and run this world successfully for a long time! Just because you are hurting right now does not mean I have lost control. There are still a lot of things you do not know!” Would those words have been encouraging? Does hearing about “behemoth and leviathan” help when you are hurting? Does it help to know that the God who created “behemoth and leviathan” is on your side? And that He knows what He is doing? Isn’t God challenging Job and his friends to get “the larger picture”? Does it give you courage and hope to know that your heavenly Father created and sustains the entire universe?
16. God apparently accused Job of wanting to know too much. Is it possible to want to know too much about God?
17. Read Job 42:7-17. Why did God say to Job’s friends, “You did not speak the truth about me, the way my servant Job did”? (Job 42:7, *GNB*) What did Job say that was correct while his friends were wrong?
18. There are some situations which seem almost hopeless. What should we say to a friend who is dying of cancer? Or to a friend with significant financial responsibilities who has just been fired? Or to a friend whose marriage is “on the rocks” and his/her spouse just left?
19. Does God want us to take a “Pollyanna” approach? If we can believe in “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by,” can we just forget about what is happening here and now? There is a story told about an elderly Christian who lived in the early centuries of severe Christian persecution. He was finally arrested and people testified that, indeed, he was a Christian. Paraphrasing the conversation, the judge having some pity on him because of his elderly age said to him, “Don’t you know that I have the authority to take your life?” To which the elderly Christian replied, “You can’t have my life, because I have already given it to Jesus.” According to the story, the judge was so stunned by that answer that he responded, “Either this old man knows something that the rest of us should know, or else he’s so deluded he can’t be any real harm to society, so I’m going to let him go.” Can we as Christians look beyond any kind of trouble we might face to the promise of heaven, and just sail along as if we were not troubled right now?
20. Read Isaiah 41:8-14. Those words were written in a time of deep distress for the northern nation of Israel and also for the southern kingdom of Judah. It seemed like God had

disappeared. Where was the God of David and Solomon when they needed Him?

21. Have you ever felt that God was out of reach? Have you tried “practicing the presence of God”? What would happen in your life if you, in every situation, stopped and asked yourself, “What difference does it make to know that God is right here with me?”
22. When we see others being oppressed or we feel that we are being oppressed because of some injustice, how should we as a church respond? Does God concern Himself with civil injustice? Would we ever be justified in engaging in civil disobedience? Or should we just wait until God gives clear instructions about how we should move forward?
23. How often is it the case that God cannot help us because we want one thing while God wants something else?
24. When things get really tough for you personally, where do you look for hope and guidance?
25. Read Jeremiah 29:1-14. Following God’s instruction, Jeremiah had written a letter to the captives near Babylon. Incredible as it might have seemed to them at the time, He told them to settle down, to work hard, to build homes, to raise crops, and to work for the benefit of their captors. Does that sound like a hopeful message?
26. In the days of Jeremiah, things looked particularly bleak. In the letter which Jeremiah wrote to the exiles, do you see any basis for hope? Notice three points that Jeremiah made:
 - 1) Jeremiah 29:4 suggests that their situation was not the result of chance or unpredictable evil. They were still “in the palm of God’s hand.”
 - 2) God was still willing to work with them despite their problems. He even suggested that they should pray for the prosperity of the city where they were living in exile!
 - 3) God had an overall plan and He continues to have that overall plan. He gave them a specific time when their exile would come to an end. (Jeremiah 29:10)
27. But God clearly had a larger issue that He wanted to promote. He was trying to help them grow spiritually and not just to recover their lost property. Once again, we see the need to discover “the larger picture.”
28. Read Hebrews 12:1-13. After reviewing the cases of many Old Testament individuals (Hebrews 11) some of whom were shining examples of faith—and others not so much—Paul [paraphrased] said, “With all these people as examples, what should you do? Considering all the difficulties they went through, should you be surprised that God is disciplining you? God is not disciplining you because He likes to punish His children but rather, because that leads to the natural process of spiritual growth.”
29. Notice specifically where that discipline is coming from. God is the one who brings it. And what is the purpose of God’s discipline? It is for the purpose of training us in right living. And what is the goal of that right living? The goal is a righteous life that we will take to heaven.
30. Honestly now, is there any reason why the Christian should give up his hope? Read Romans 8:36-39. Clearly, Paul was convinced that nothing could ever separate us from the hope and love that we have in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

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