

“A HEART FOR GOD” LESSON 10 A REASON TO HOPE

BIBLE BOOK CLUB OCTOBER 17TH



TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- **ARE YOU ASSURED OF GOD'S UNWAVERING LOVE FOR YOU, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULTIES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS?**
- **WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE GIVEN YOU HOPE IN GOD, PARTICULARLY IN TIMES OF DESPAIR?**
- **HAS GOD SURPRISED YOU WITH AN INTERVENTION IN YOUR TIME OF NEED? HAS THERE EVER BEEN A TIME WHEN YOU HAVE RECOGNIZED GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE (EVEN IF YOU REALIZED IT ONLY IN HINDSIGHT)?**
- **HOW DOES THE EXAMPLE OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST OR OTHER BIBLICAL PEOPLE INSPIRE YOU OR INCREASE YOUR HOPE IN TIMES OF SUFFERING, DISAPPOINTMENT, OR DESPAIR?**
- **IN TIMES WHEN DESPAIR HAS OVERWHELMED YOU, IN TIMES WHEN YOU HAVE MADE WRONG CHOICES, HAVE YOU OPENED YOUR HEART TO GOD AS THE SOURCE OF HOPE? OR HAVE YOU SOUGHT SYMPATHY, REASSURANCE, COMPASSION, EVEN VALIDATION FOR YOUR ACTIONS OR TO HOLD ON TO THE HURT?**

THE END OF KING SAUL (1 SAMUEL 28)

WHAT A DIFFERENCE IT MIGHT HAVE MADE IN THE LIFE OF KING SAUL HAD HE LISTENED TO GOD, YIELDED TO GOD'S WISDOM, AND ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE IN TRUE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD RATHER THAN REMAINING IN CONSTANT REBELLION AGAINST THE LORD.

LOOK AT THE LIFE OF DAVID, BY CONTRAST, AS HE ENDURED TRIBULATIONS WITH UNWAVERING HOPE IN GOD. WE KNOW THAT DAVID'S STORY ENDS WITH GOD FULFILLING HIS PROMISE TO MAKE DAVID A KING. LET'S SEE HOW THE STORY ENDED FOR KING SAUL.

⁴THE PHILISTINES ASSEMBLED AND CAME AND SET UP CAMP AT SHUNEM, WHILE SAUL GATHERED ALL ISRAEL AND SET UP CAMP AT GILBOA. ⁵WHEN SAUL SAW THE PHILISTINE ARMY, HE WAS AFRAID; TERROR FILLED HIS HEART. ⁶HE INQUIRED OF THE LORD, BUT THE LORD DID NOT ANSWER HIM BY DREAMS OR URIM OR PROPHETS. ⁷SAUL THEN SAID TO HIS ATTENDANTS, "FIND ME A WOMAN WHO IS A MEDIUM, SO I MAY GO AND INQUIRE OF HER." "THERE IS ONE IN ENDOR," THEY SAID.

⁸SO SAUL DISGUISED HIMSELF, PUTTING ON OTHER CLOTHES, AND AT NIGHT HE AND TWO MEN WENT TO THE WOMAN. "CONSULT A SPIRIT FOR ME," HE SAID, "AND BRING UP FOR ME THE ONE I NAME." ⁹BUT THE WOMAN SAID TO HIM, "SURELY YOU KNOW WHAT SAUL HAS DONE. HE HAS CUT OFF THE MEDIUMS AND SPIRITISTS FROM THE LAND. WHY HAVE YOU SET A TRAP FOR MY LIFE TO BRING ABOUT MY DEATH?" ¹⁰SAUL SWORE TO HER BY THE LORD, "AS SURELY AS THE LORD LIVES, YOU WILL NOT BE PUNISHED FOR THIS." ¹¹THEN THE WOMAN ASKED, "WHOM SHALL I BRING UP FOR YOU?" "BRING UP SAMUEL," HE SAID.

¹²WHEN THE WOMAN SAW SAMUEL, SHE CRIED OUT AT THE TOP OF HER VOICE AND SAID TO SAUL, "WHY HAVE YOU DECEIVED ME? YOU ARE SAUL!" ¹³THE KING SAID TO HER, "DON'T BE AFRAID. WHAT DO YOU SEE?" THE WOMAN SAID, "I SEE A GHOSTLY FIGURE¹⁴ COMING UP OUT OF THE EARTH." ¹⁴"WHAT DOES HE LOOK LIKE?" HE ASKED. "AN OLD MAN WEARING A ROBE IS COMING UP," SHE SAID.

THEN SAUL KNEW IT WAS SAMUEL, AND HE BOWED DOWN AND PROSTRATED HIMSELF WITH HIS FACE TO THE GROUND. ¹⁵SAMUEL SAID TO SAUL, "WHY HAVE YOU DISTURBED ME BY BRINGING ME UP?"

"I AM IN GREAT DISTRESS," SAUL SAID. "THE PHILISTINES ARE FIGHTING AGAINST ME, AND GOD HAS DEPARTED FROM ME. HE NO LONGER ANSWERS ME, EITHER BY PROPHETS OR BY DREAMS. SO I HAVE CALLED ON YOU TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO."

¹⁶SAMUEL SAID, "WHY DO YOU CONSULT ME, NOW THAT THE LORD HAS DEPARTED FROM YOU AND BECOME YOUR ENEMY? ¹⁷THE LORD HAS DONE WHAT HE PREDICTED THROUGH ME. THE LORD HAS TORN THE KINGDOM OUT OF YOUR HANDS AND GIVEN IT TO ONE OF YOUR NEIGHBORS—TO DAVID. ¹⁸BECAUSE YOU DID NOT OBEY THE LORD OR CARRY OUT HIS FIERCE WRATH AGAINST THE AMALEKITES, THE LORD HAS DONE THIS TO YOU TODAY. ¹⁹THE LORD WILL DELIVER BOTH ISRAEL AND YOU INTO THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES, AND TOMORROW YOU AND YOUR SONS WILL BE WITH ME. THE LORD WILL ALSO GIVE THE ARMY OF ISRAEL INTO THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES."

²⁰IMMEDIATELY SAUL FELL FULL LENGTH ON THE GROUND, FILLED WITH FEAR BECAUSE OF SAMUEL'S WORDS. HIS STRENGTH WAS GONE, FOR HE HAD EATEN NOTHING ALL THAT DAY AND ALL THAT NIGHT.

IS GOD REFUSING TO SPEAK TO ME OR AM I REFUSING TO LISTEN TO GOD?

GOD WANTS US TO KNOW HIM. FOR THAT REASON HE HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN MANY WAYS: IN THE WONDERS OF THE WORLD HE HAS CREATED (GENERAL REVELATION**), IN THE SPECIAL REVEALMENT OF HIS **WRITTEN WORD**, IN THE FLESH WHEN **CHRIST** LIVED AMONG US, BY OUR **CIRCUMSTANCES**, AND BY THE **PEOPLE** HE BRINGS INTO OUR LIVES.**

SOME CIRCUMSTANCES TRULY BRING US TO DESPAIR (SUCH AS GRIEF AND LOSS). PEOPLE IN SUCH SITUATIONS SHOULD RECEIVE OUR **LOVE AND **REASSURANCE**. LET US RECALL HOW JOB WAS INNOCENT BUT HIS FRIENDS ACCUSED HIM OF CAUSING HIS OWN SUFFERING BY SINNING.**

OTHER TIMES, OUR DESPAIR IS BORN OUT OF OUR OWN **REBELLION AGAINST THE **TRUTH** ABOUT OUR SITUATION OR OUR **SIN** AGAINST GOD. SAUL WAS SEEKING SAMUEL BECAUSE HE WANTED **REASSURANCE** THAT HIS DISTANCE FROM GOD AND **DISOBEDIENCE** TO GOD WOULD NOT AFFECT HIS HOPE FOR VICTORY AGAINST THE PHILISTINES.**

SAUL HAD BEEN GIVEN THE WORD OF GOD, THE LAW OF MOSES, AND THE GUIDANCE OF SAMUEL THROUGHOUT HIS REIGN, YET HE REBELLED AGAINST THEIR GUIDANCE. HE LISTENED TO THOSE WHO SAID WHAT HE WANTED TO HEAR INSTEAD OF THOSE WHO SPOKE THE TRUTH. HIS WAS A SUPERFICIAL FAITH BASED IN RELIGIOUS RITUAL WITHOUT GENUINE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. IT WAS A FAITH OF **LEGALISM INSTEAD OF **LOVE** FOR GOD.**

WHEN OUR DESPAIR IS A PRODUCT OF OUR OWN CHOICES, OUR REFUSAL TO CHANGE OR PURSUE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AND RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, HOPE COMES DOWN TO OUR WILLINGNESS TO HONESTLY EXAMINE OURSELVES AND MAKE THE DECISION TO DO THE WORK TO CHANGE. IN OTHER WORDS, GOD IS ALWAYS REACHING FOR US BUT IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO REACH BACK TOWARDS HIM.

AT THAT POINT, WE HAVE A CHOICE: WE CAN HOLD ONTO OUR HUFF WITH ALL OUR MIGHT OR WE CAN TURN AND FACE THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES AND REACH FOR THE **LORD, OUR SOURCE OF **TRUE HOPE**.**

TRUE HOPE KEEPS A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

FALSE FAITH

- **ASKS HOW MUCH ONE CAN STRAY FROM GOD'S WILL, SIN, "BEND THE RULES" AND STILL GO TO HEAVEN.**
- **PUTS HOPE FOR SALVATION IN ONE'S PERSONAL OBEDIENCE TO RULES AND RITUAL (TITHING, CHURCH ATTENDANCE, CONFESSION, ETC.) WITHOUT A HEART TRULY TURNED TOWARDS THE LORD OR DESIRE TO KNOW GOD.**

RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

- **CHOOSES TO ALIGN ONE'S WILL WITH GOD'S WILL.**
- **SEEKS TO ESTABLISH A REAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD INSTEAD OF APPEASING GOD.**
- **UNDERSTANDS THE TRUE HOPE FOR SALVATION DOES NOT COME FROM SELF-EFFORT BUT FROM RECEIVING THE GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE THROUGH JESUS.**

THE HARD TRUTH IS THAT THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO OUR CHOICES, ESPECIALLY OUR SINS, BUT IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO LOOK FOR HOPE IN JESUS.

DAVID AND THE AMALEKITES (1 SAMUEL 30)

IN CONTRAST WITH SAUL'S TENDENCIES TOWARDS REBELLION AND HARD-HEARTEDNESS TOWARDS GOD, LET'S EXAMINE HOW DAVID RESPONDED IN A TIME OF GREAT DESPAIR. DAVID HAD MADE A MISTAKE LEAVING HIS VILLAGE UNGUARDED. NOTICE IN THIS STORY THE CONSEQUENCES OF DAVID'S CHOICE AND THAT DAVID'S RESPONSE IS TO GO IMMEDIATELY TO GOD. HE DID SO BY PRAYER, NOT BY CONSULTING A HUMAN MEDIUM. NOT ONLY DID HE TURN TO GOD, HE IMMEDIATELY HEEDED GOD'S ANSWER. HIS CONFIDENT HOPE, AS ALWAYS, WAS IN THE LORD. HIS HOPE WAS ANSWERED BY SUCCESS IN RESCUING THE CAPTIVES.

DAVID AND HIS MEN REACHED ZIKLAG ON THE THIRD DAY. NOW THE AMALEKITES HAD RAIDED THE NEGEV AND ZIKLAG. THEY HAD ATTACKED ZIKLAG AND BURNED IT, ²AND HAD TAKEN CAPTIVE THE WOMEN AND EVERYONE ELSE IN IT, BOTH YOUNG AND OLD. THEY KILLED NONE OF THEM, BUT CARRIED THEM OFF AS THEY WENT ON THEIR WAY.

³WHEN DAVID AND HIS MEN REACHED ZIKLAG, THEY FOUND IT DESTROYED BY FIRE AND THEIR WIVES AND SONS AND DAUGHTERS TAKEN CAPTIVE. ⁴SO DAVID AND HIS MEN WEPT ALOUD UNTIL THEY HAD NO STRENGTH LEFT TO WEEP. ⁵DAVID'S TWO WIVES HAD BEEN CAPTURED—AHINOAM OF JEZREEL AND ABIGAIL, THE WIDOW OF NABAL OF CARMEL. ⁶DAVID WAS GREATLY DISTRESSED BECAUSE THE MEN WERE TALKING OF STONING HIM; EACH ONE WAS BITTER IN SPIRIT BECAUSE OF HIS SONS AND DAUGHTERS. BUT DAVID FOUND STRENGTH IN THE LORD HIS GOD.

⁷THEN DAVID SAID TO ABIATHAR THE PRIEST, THE SON OF AHIMELEK, “BRING ME THE EPHOD.” ABIATHAR BROUGHT IT TO HIM, ⁸AND DAVID INQUIRED OF THE LORD, “SHALL I PURSUE THIS RAIDING PARTY? WILL I OVERTAKE THEM?” “PURSUE THEM,” HE ANSWERED. “YOU WILL CERTAINLY OVERTAKE THEM AND SUCCEED IN THE RESCUE.”

⁹DAVID AND THE SIX HUNDRED MEN WITH HIM CAME TO THE BESOR VALLEY, WHERE SOME STAYED BEHIND. ¹⁰TWO HUNDRED OF THEM WERE TOO EXHAUSTED TO CROSS THE VALLEY, BUT DAVID AND THE OTHER FOUR HUNDRED CONTINUED THE PURSUIT.

WHAT CAN THE EXAMPLE OF DAVID TEACH US ABOUT FAITH?

- **HOPE IS TIED TO FAITH IN GOD, WHO IS TRUSTWORTHY, LOVING, HOLY, JUST, FORGIVING, MERCIFUL, AND GOOD. THERE IS NO LIMIT TO GOD'S LOVE FOR US. HE IS WILLING TO FORGIVE US AS MANY TIMES AS WE WILL REPENT AND TURN TO HIM WITH AN OPEN HEART.**
- **HOPE DOES NOT DEPEND ON OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. OUR FUTURE DESTINATION DOES NOT DEPEND ON OUR PRESENT LOCATION, SO LONG AS WE ARE WALKING WITH GOD.**
- **HOPE DOES NOT DEPEND ON OUR OWN ADEQUACY. CULTURE PRESSURES US TO BE SELF-RELIANT, SELF-CONFIDENT, TO ACCOMPLISH BY SELF-EFFORT, EVEN TO DENY OUR OWN MISTAKES FOR FEAR OF JUDGEMENT. WE TRY TO CONTROL OURSELVES. WE TRY TO CONTROL OUR FUTURE (AT LEAST TO PLAN IT). WE TRY TO CONTROL GOD. WE NEED ONLY TO BE STRONG IN OUR FAITH IN GOD'S ADEQUACY (2 TIMOTHY 2:1)**
- **HOPE DOES NOT DEPEND ON THINKING POSITIVE. WE CAN ACKNOWLEDGE WHEN TIMES ARE BAD. GOD KNOWS WHAT'S IN OUR HEARTS. WE DON'T NEED TO PUT ON THE BRAVE FACE OR STAY UPBEAT TO IMPRESS GOD OR ANYONE ELSE. WE CAN CRY, GRIEVE, QUESTION, OR WE ONLY NEED TO REMAIN POSITIVE THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL.**
- **HOPE DOESN'T DEPEND ON LIFE BEING "FAIR". KNOWING GOD MEANS KNOWING THAT THE WORLD HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY SIN. WE WILL LIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT CORRUPTED BY SATAN. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT A PERMANENT SITUATION. GOD USES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES TO CULTIVATE AND SHAPE US AND BRING US TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY TO THAT WE CAN SEE OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE FROM HIS PERSPECTIVE. GOD HAS PROMISED US THAT, IN THE END, WE WILL BE VICTORIOUS IN CHRIST. NO MATTER THE TRIBULATION OR TRAGEDY, NOTHING SEPARATES US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD.**

HOW DO WE STAY ROOTED IN GOD IN TIMES OF DESPAIR?

- **REFLECT ON WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN THE PAST---FOR HIS PEOPLE AS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE AND FOR YOU PERSONALLY IN YOUR LIFE. LOOK FOR THE “SPIRITUAL MARKERS” IN YOUR LIFETIME, THOSE MOMENTS WHERE YOU FELT THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE OR UNDERSTOOD HOW HE HAD INTERVENED AND INTERACTED IN YOUR LIFE. WERE THERE PEOPLE WHO CHANGED YOUR LIFE FOR THE BETTER? A TIME WHEN A PRAYER WAS ANSWERED IN UNEXPECTED, LIFE-ALTERING WAYS?**
- **LOOK FOR THE WAYS THAT GOD IS ACTIVE IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW. SHUT OUT THOSE “NAGGING VOICES” IN YOUR MIND THAT CAUSE YOU DOUBT. ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONCERNS WEIGHING ON YOUR HEART AND OFFER THEM TO GOD. BUT WHATEVER HAPPENS, DO NOT LET DAY-TO-DAY LIVING DISTRACT YOU FROM YOUR TIME OF WORSHIP, PRAYER, AND MEDITATION IN GOD’S WORD. ALLOW THAT TIME FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO REFRESH YOU. IT’S ONLY WHEN WE QUIET OUR HEARTS AND LISTEN THAT WE CAN SEE AND HEAR GOD AT WORK IN OUR LIVES. WE ARE PART OF HIS FAMILY. HE HAS PLANS FOR OUR FUTURE AND OUR GOOD, EVEN IF IT DOESN’T SEEM THAT WAY NOW.**
- **LOOK TO THE EXAMPLES OF THE FAITHFUL PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE. SPEAK TO THEM ABOUT THEIR TRUST AND HOPE IN GOD. PRAY WITHOUT JUDGEMENT FOR THOSE PEOPLE WHOM YOU SEE STRUGGLING WITH BAD HABITS, WRONG CHOICES, OR OTHER CRISES OF FAITH, AND WHEN ASKED, SPEAK THE TRUTH IN GOD’S LOVE.**
- **CONSIDER THE FUTURE: GOD IS USING OUR EVERY EXPERIENCE TO WEAVE US INTO HIS PURPOSES, WHICH WE MAY NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND UNTIL THE TIME THAT WE ARE FINALLY HOME AND UNITED WITH HIM. WE DON’T HAVE THE BLUEPRINT FOR OUR LIVES AND OUR FUTURE, BUT WE CAN TRUST THE ONE WHO DOES AND MEET HIM HALFWAY BY BUILDING OURSELVES A SOLID FOUNDATION ON FAITH IN CHRIST.**

RESOURCES:

- **“A HEART FOR GOD”; REBECCA MANLEY PIPPERT, IVP BOOKS, 1996**