

Strength during times of adversity

A message by Adolfo Araya

A pressing question:

Just a few days ago, a tragic event made national news. A man shot and killed his wife, 14 year old son, 7 year old daughter and family dog at night while they slept. He then shot himself. All who knew the family knew the family as a “nice church going family.” The husband was a cabinet installer who also worked part time as a janitor at a local school. His wife worked part time at an animal hospital near by. Their house had a “for sale” sign for over a year and on their front lawn there were two rocks with an inscription on them. One read “The Lord is my rock” and the other read “We will serve the Lord”. Many around the community were shocked to not have noticed any signs of a serious breakdown. What happened?

The Dalton family was no different from the families that regularly worship at our community of faith. Yet just like them many of us may be silently struggling with thoughts of defeat. A number of us may be asking ourselves “will I be next”? This reality warrants a close look at what the Scriptures may offer us to encourage and strengthen us today.

Biblical Background:

Three Bible passages can offer us invaluable help during hard times:

Job 1:6-12 tells of Satan requesting permission of God to afflict Job. Satan’s objective is to demoralize and weaken Job so that he would curse God.

The second passage is in **Mark 1:22-28**. This passage narrates the works of Jesus as he begins his ministry. Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God, healed the sick and cast out unclean spirits. As he cast out unclean spirits he ordered them to be silent.

The third passage is in **Hebrews 2:5-12** which describes who we are in the eyes of God.

Where it all starts:

All things that are done, whether good or bad begin with a thought. In the passage of Job, a good man who was “*blameless and upright who feared God and shunned evil*” was about to face severe hardship. He was about to lose all his possessions, his family and his health. This was not God’s idea, and it was not Job’s idea. Clearly, it was Satan’s idea. We notice in the passage that Satan’s words are critical, negative, cynical and full of accusations and slander. We also notice that Satan is restless and bitter. But most importantly we notice that Satan has to request permission to afflict God’s sons and daughters.

When any of us face difficulties we find that the worst of it comes from thoughts that flood our mind. Thoughts like “will I make it through?”, “I won’t be able to pay my bills”, “will I be embarrassed?”, “am I going to be alone?”, etc.

Such thoughts wake us up at night, they weaken us in the morning, they cloud our mind and drain our energy. As we allow these thoughts to recur, they multiply. We often think of such thoughts as our own because they speak to us in our own voice.

Anxious Thoughts:

Jesus knew that Satan’s power is rooted in his words. So it is not surprising that Jesus commanded demons to “be quiet” and did not let them speak. Jesus knew that those

voices, if allowed to speak would grow and take root. So we can conclude that the negative thoughts that plague us during hard times are not our own. We would not poison ourselves willingly. We also know that those words are not God's words. God's words are full of light and clarity. In **Mark 3:13** we read that Jesus called us to "**be with him, to preach and to have authority over demons**". So in the name of Jesus, each of us has authority over every negative thought that comes to our mind. Simply saying to those voices "in the name of Jesus, I command you to be silent and leave my mind" will cleanse us from such annoyances.

We can Endure:

It may also help us to remember **I Corinthians 10:13**, where we are given the assurance that God will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to bear. And with the test God will provide a way out so that we can overcome. Just as God knew that Job would be able to sustain his trials, God will not allow any affliction to come to us that we cannot endure. In the same way we can remind ourselves of this fact by saying "God would not have allowed this situation if he had not thought that I could endure it."

We can get a good night's sleep:

Another passage that can help us is Proverbs 3:24-26 which reads "**when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.**" How often do we ask God to take authority over our sleep at night, to give us pleasant dreams and to strengthen us? Many of us did this when we were children and for some reason we stopped doing it. Maybe it is time to ask God to take authority over our sleep. We can be sure that the negative thoughts will not be able to take root in our minds at night while we sleep. In Proverbs 3:5-6 we also read "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**"

Philippi, a suffering community

The entire letter of Paul to the Philippians is a response to an act of kindness. A simple reading of that short letter tells us that Paul was in prison, was discouraged and felt neglected. He was old and was even thinking that death would be better than life. He also had deep financial need. But the small congregation of Philippi heard of Paul's situation and sent a generous gift to him. By the wording of the letter we can conclude that folks in Philippi were also enduring great hardship. But they did a generous act nevertheless. Perhaps this precious letter of Paul would never have been written had it not been for the gift of the Philippians. What a gift to the world was that gift. Paul is filled with joy and exclaims "**rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice**". He also says "**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**" And "**the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**" Did you get that? Logic and human understanding may have reached certain tragic conclusions about our situation. But God's peace surpasses any situation. God's peace is able to guard our mind from negative thoughts of defeat. Paul also writes "**I can do everything through him**

who gives me strength.” He also urges us to fill our minds with positive thoughts ***“whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.”*** Finally Paul assures us ***“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*** Finally Paul writes ***“I can do everything through him who gives me strength”.***

A Life of Kindness

Mark Twain said “I can live on a compliment for three months”. Perhaps each of us can rise up and look for ways to do and say kind things. The Philippians had no idea that their gift would break the bondage Paul found himself in. They had no idea that as a result of that gift the world would receive some of the most encouraging words Paul ever wrote. In the same way, we can encourage one another with kind words and loving friendship. Most Christians are reluctant to let others know that they are in need. So each of us needs to encourage those near us and lend a hand.

Who we are in Christ:

Finally, we can paraphrase Hebrews chapter 2 as follows: *God remembers us, visits us and crowns each of us with honor, glory and authority. Jesus died for us and did away with our eternal death. Jesus calls us brothers and sisters. Jesus is looking forward to the day in which he will be together with us. Jesus destroys with his blood all the schemes of the devil. Jesus gives us freedom from all fears, even the fear of death.*

We must always remember who we are in the eyes of God. Our balance sheet, our medical charts and our acquaintances may paint a picture of who we may be, but Hebrews 2 tells us who we really are.

We can be encouraged that ***“our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20)*** and God will see us through even our present situation. So let us intentionally encourage one another today and each day after that. AMEN

Conclusion:

Psalm 34:19 reads ***“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.”*** As we go through our lives we will experience difficulties and trials. But as we do, we can rely on the Scriptures to show us how to manage those stages. We have been given authority by God through Christ to fend off negative voices and ideas. We have been given access to God to ask for rest and protection. We can be sure of how important we are in God’s heart, and we can look after one another to comfort and encourage one another. So in Christ ***we are more than conquerors through him (Christ) who loved us. Romans 8:37.***