

DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT FOR A NEW YEAR

Scripture reading: Psalm 98.
Text: 1 Sam. 30:1-6.

Intro: From many standpoints, 1974 has not been a good year. This has been one of the most humiliating times in our nation's history because our President was forced to resign over Watergate. The moral standards of our nation have hardly ever been at a lower ebb. Our young people in large numbers continue to ruin their lives by drugs, and alcoholism has increased among all ages -- from the very young to the very old, among men and among women. Crime was described in a recent issue of a national news magazine as "out of control." Unrest seems to characterize every nation on the face of the earth.

As we look to the future the predictions seem to indicate that 1975 will be more of what we have had in 1974 -- only worse! Dr. McGee wrote in his January letter,

"It is ironic that at the time we are preparing to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of our nation, we also seem to be preparing to attend its funeral. The future does not look bright."

Personally and nationally we have many reasons to be concerned. As inflation continues and gets worse, it seems very possible that things are beyond the control which man so proudly claimed just a few months ago.

Pessimism, discouragement, despondency, despair, and other words like them are the words which describe conditions today.

Many international observers are predicting that one thing that 1975 will bring will be an all-out war between Israel and the Arab States. No one knows for sure, but the signs are all there.

We feel like the Apostle Paul must have felt in Romans 8 when he wrote,

"What shall we then say to these things?"(Rom. 8:31).

Do we as believers have any hope? And, do we have any hope that we can offer to the world in this time of ever-increasing need?

If there is hope, the only place that we can learn about it is in the Word of God. As we turn to the Scriptures, there are certain things that are evident. And so let us notice . . .

I. SOME BASIC TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE.

A. Scripture is full of examples (as is secular history) that nations which have turned their backs upon the Lord are destined for utter ruin.

If you want to get the right perspective of history, you need to read the OT prophets. There you will read why Egypt fell, why Assyria fell, why Babylon fell, and why many other nations fell -- including Israel and Judah.

And one of the significant things about the attitude of all of these nations was the fact that they did not believe it could happen to them. NO NATION ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO TURN AWAY FROM GOD AND SURVIVE.

- B. Our values as a nation have been turned in the wrong direction.

We are a nation that lives for pleasure and for material possessions. We are interested in holidays -- and we continually want more and more money for doing less and less work.

In a recent business magazine the facts were stated that if an employer does not watch his employees carefully over half of them will steal from him in either time or material or both. But it added -- if he does watch them about one-fourth will still try it.

Our Lord stated very clearly that . . .

"a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

- C. The Word indicates that world conditions are going to be just like we see them today when the Lord returns.

Cf. 2 Tim. 3:1 ff. (Read vv. 1-5.)

No one when can say when the Lord will return, but we can say that the conditions are such He could come any time -- even today!

What is the answer? What can we say to these things?

II. THE EXAMPLE OF DAVID. Read 1 Sam. 30:1-6.

- A. What he did: In v. 6 we read, "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

1. The place where God starts: with His people.

Again the Word of God helps us. If any generation is to be turned toward the Lord, that work will start in the hearts of the people of God. Look at the people of the world today. Things can be crumbling all around them, but they do not see it!

2. What David was after: encouragement.

This means that he wanted to find hope, help, courage -- to believe that things could be better.

Everybody is looking for words of encouragement in these days, but very few are looking where David looked.

3. Where he looked: to "the Lord his God."

This means that he looked to Jehovah, his Elohim.

Three things immediately stand out:

- 1) His God was a living God.
- 2) His God was an unchanging God.
- 3) His God was a mighty God.

And then you will notice in v. 8 that he prayed -- he "inquired of the Lord."

And the significant thing is that the Lord was the only One he could look to, and the Lord was sufficient.

Often the Lord has to put us in circumstances where we have no one to look to but Him, and then we learn how really wonderful the Lord is.

B. How we can follow David's example in 1975.

How do we encourage ourselves in the Lord?

1. What we need to understand.

The Hebrew word for encourage conveys to us the idea of binding ourselves to something, or, in this case, to Someone! In this way, we share in all that the Lord is.

2. The God we seek.

He is all to us that He was to David since He is Jehovah, the unchanging One. But how well do we know God. A. W. Tozer once wrote,

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like" (The Know-

ledge of the Holy, p. 9).

What do you think of when you think of God?

We should have an even clearer picture because the Lord Jesus Christ had not come when David was living.

Out of the many, many wonderful attributes of God, let me just select 4 this morning -- 4 which will give us all of the encouragement we need to face any thing that comes in 1975:

a. The faithfulness of God.

Cf. 1 Cor. 1:9,

"God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

Through all of 1975 God will not fail us. He will always be true to His Word. His promises are sure. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:13,

"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself."

b. The wisdom of God.

Paul states it uniquely in 1 Cor. 1:25,

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

But God has never been foolish. He has never made a mistake. He never does anything which does not need to be done.

c. The love of God.

Cf. Jer. 31:3,

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."

Do what we may, we can never do anything that will ever cause God to stop loving us, nor can we ever be involved in circumstances where His love is unable to reach us.

Cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 8:35-39.

d. The power of God.

This is the first thing that hits you when you begin to read your Bible.

When Sarah laughed after the Lord told her that she would be a mother even in her old age, the Lord responded with the question,

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"
(Gen. 18:14a).

Cf. Eph. 3:20, 21.

David was in trouble in the passage which we read this morning. This is why he sought encouragement from "the Lord, his GOD"!

Your troubles, your needs, can never get so great that your God, El Shaddai, is unable to meet your need.

Concl: Look for a moment, will you, at the world.

Then look at your own problems, your own needs.

The sight is overwhelming, isn't it?

Now look at the Lord -- remembering He is faithful, remembering how wise He is, how loving He is, and how mighty He is! And then remember the promise of Isa. 26:3, 4.

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.

-- Annie Johnson Flint.