



Lesson One: The Problem of Hopelessness.

Introduction. The news is filled with ominous warnings that cause concern for the future. Failing health in our body or in those of people we love leave us cautious and pessimistic. We have faced some hard times. One of us lost a job; another had an accident, while still others have faced major problems within the family. In our nation, our churches, our homes, our families, our hearts, and minds circumstances arise that bring our souls to the point we fail to see any hope within our lives.

I. Why Do People Lose Hope?

- A. Naomi felt hopeless because her husband and her sons had died (Ruth 1:11-13). She felt that God had “gone out against” her. Little did she know that there were still bright days that lay ahead of her.
- B. When we don’t get the things we may have wanted in life it can make us feel hopeless (Prov. 13:12). The word translated “deferred” means “to draw out, prolong” (BDB). It is difficult to be patient when we want or need something that doesn’t come when we think it should.
- C. When things fail us upon which we relied we can come to feel “hope is lost” (Ezek. 37:11-14). Ezekiel is given a vision during the Babylonian exile of dry bones brought back to life. The Jews who faced the hardship of this period of punishment felt their hope of deliverance was gone.
- D. Trials and severe hardships can lead us to hopelessness (Lam. 3:17-18). When Jerusalem fell at the beginning of the exile, Jeremiah expressed this sense fear.
 - 1. Remarkably in spite of these trials Jeremiah maintained hope (Lam. 3:19-24).
- E. The finality of life on earth can leave man hopeless (1 Chron. 29:15). David recognized that man has no hope to live endlessly on earth. All men will die.
- F. Those who follow the “dictates of their own heart” imagine that following God’s will is hopeless (Jer. 18:11-12). The Jews rejected God’s warnings before the exile as “hopeless.” Man today imagines obedience to God offers little hope.

II. Sometimes We May Have Hopes That are Misguided.

- A. Some set their hope on material things (Job 31:24-28). Job understood to do this is to deny God.
 - 1. Trust in earthly things is a hope that is “vain” (Ps. 33:16-19).
 - 2. The Christian’s hope must not be in this life alone (1 Cor. 15:16-19).
- B. Imagining that sin will answer our problems is also a vain hope (Ps. 62:10-12).
 - 1. Sinful attitudes leave one with less hope than “a fool” (Prov. 26:12; 29:20).

Conclusion. Feeling a sense of hopelessness or relying on misguided or vain hopes is a paralyzing and disheartening condition. As common as such a state may be this is not how God would have us to live our lives. The Bible teaches the important role hope should play in the life of the Christian. The gospel can raise us out of despair and darkness of hopelessness and offer us reasons to have hope even in life's darkest days.

Discussion Questions

1. The book of Ruth reveals the reality that God was not "against" Naomi and her family. What attitudes or facts about God might have helped Naomi avoid this sense of hopelessness? _____

2. The wise man speaks of a heart made "sick" from deferred hopes (Prov. 13:12). Does a delay in attaining something desired always mean it will never come? _____
How do we help children avoid this heart sickness when their desires are not met?

3. Why would Job argue that things such as trusting in gold amount to denying God (Job 31:24-28)? _____

Will this kind of hope satisfy or ultimately disappoint us? _____
4. During the Babylonian exile Jews who had rejected God as well as those who trusted in God experienced the consequences of this punishment. Can those faithful to God ever come to feel "hope is lost" (see Ezek. 37:11-14)? _____
Can the words revealed to Ezekiel teach us anything about how to handle such times?

5. Jeremiah expressed both a feeling of hopelessness but a determination to maintain his hope in God (Lam. 3:17-24). Is this contradictory? _____

Does this teach us anything about how to view conditions that lead us to feel hopeless?

6. Explain David's words: "Our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope" (1 Chron. 29:15). _____

Does this teach that life is hopeless? _____

7. In the context of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 what does Paul say is a reason to place hope beyond this life? _____
8. Summarize the two attitudes the wise man says leave one with less hope than a "fool."

_____ (Prov. 26:12).

_____ (Prov. 29:20).

