

Our Stronghold or God's?

By Bob Young

"...Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah ..." (1 Samuel 22:5).

In our text, David is fleeing from Saul. David and his fighting men were hiding in the cave of Adullam. Many of the rejected and disenfranchised in Israel had come and joined David's army. The cave provided protection, isolation, and strength. David was content to stay in the safety of the stronghold, but God's prophet came to David and told him to leave the stronghold and go into the land of Judah. It is interesting that Judah means "praise." The meaning of this phrase may be that David will never be able to genuinely praise God until he gives us what is comfortable and moves ahead, not dependent upon human strongholds or his own strength, but dependent upon God.

When life beats us down and we want to hide or isolate ourselves from the challenges of life, God calls us to move ahead and depend on him. God places people around us who prod us in the right direction. He does not want us to remain in the places of discouragement. He wants us to move into the lands of praise.

Many have been through difficult times. You are the exception if you cannot remember any difficult times in your life. I have been through difficult times in ministry. Difficulties drag on and on with little or no change. It is easy to retreat, easy to withdraw. It is hard to press on. Such times are discouraging. I am thankful for those who have encouraged me during discouraging times. I am thankful that my wife encourages me to keep going. I am thankful for friends and advisors, confidants and more experienced Christians who have stood by me and helped me through the challenges. Perhaps no advice has been more helpful in dealing with problems than the words of one of the first elders I worked with: "You have to keep on keeping on." We can't sit down and give up. God has a plan for us. There are people we do not even yet know who are depending on us in the Kingdom.

The first time I heard words like these, I did not understand them. Through the years, I have come to understand that God is preparing each of us to be a vessel he can use in the lives of other people. We can never become what God wants if we give up, if we shrink back, if we withdraw from life. We will never be the vessel God intends if we give up, refuse to go forward, remain in isolation, and hide from the challenges of life. We must keep moving. We must move into new realms and dimensions of life. Our attitude follows our commitment as we move from discouragement to praise.

Jesus applies the words of Isaiah 61:1-3 to his own ministry in Luke 4. "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn....a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor." These words suggest that Jesus came to help people move from difficulties to victory, from captivity to freedom, from hurt to healing. When we move from discouragement to praise, we may not escape every problem, but we begin living above our problems. Such is indeed cause for praise!