

New Hope Sermon Living in the Sufficiency of Christ 1 19 20

These past few weeks I have been meditating in Shepherds Daughters (my daily devotion for women) on the meaning of grace. I want all God's people to live in the fullness of God's grace. That seems simple enough but it isn't easy to make it practical. Then this past week I read a book that shows why it is not easy to live in the sufficiency of God's grace. It's a new book, called *Don't Lose Heart* by Jacob Meyers and I think it speaks uniquely to our church for this new year and new decade.

Why? As we begin this new decade, many of us have situations which seem negative or unknown: What school to apply to? What school will accept me? What do I do after graduation? What do I do about a relationship I am in? Is it from God or not? How do I tell? How do I handle a difficult relationship redemptively? Where will I live next year? What kind of job can I get?

When we face so many unknowns, it is easy to get discouraged or anxious. But discouragement, itself, and this is the key, beloved, comes from looking at an incomplete, and sometimes even false, way of perceiving God, ourselves and our life situations. It is based on half-truths. And that becomes the obstacle to living in Christ's sufficiency. Therefore, a way to remove that obstacle is by fighting for our sight – i.e., seeing the present and the future in terms of God's revelation.

To do this will require that we allow God to reframe our hearts and minds so that we see EVERYTHING in terms of God's limitless power and grace. We don't just focus on the things that are confusing or contrary to our faith – the things that cause us discouragement. We see these things from a bigger, more complete God-based perspective. We reframe how we see life more from God's perspective.

Those studying counseling understand that cognitive reframing is a psychological technique that consists of identifying and then disputing irrational or half-truth thoughts. Reframing is a way of viewing and experiencing events, ideas, concepts and emotions to find more positive alternatives

The example that comes to my mind is of a young father who was working on the outside of his house fixing a loose shingle on the outside second floor wall. It was pretty high up. Suddenly he felt movement on his tall ladder and looked down in horror to see his 4 year old daughter climbing up the ladder. "I'm coming to be with you, Daddy," she shouted up to him. His first reaction was to shout back, "NO! Susie, go back down! Get off this ladder right now! It is dangerous. You are not supposed to do this." And all that would be true. But he realized that his harsh response would just frighten her and she could easily lose her grip and her footing on the ladder and fall off – the very thing he wanted to avoid. So he said, "Susie, wait right there," as he started gently to climb down to reach her. "You want to see what I am doing? Come, I will carry you." When he reached her, he took her in his arms, brought her up to see his work and then carried her back down to safety. He reframed the reality of the situation. (Donald Capp, Reframing).

How does all this relate to us? What happens when what we “see” or focus on causes discouragement?

The book *Don't Lose Heart* tackles this issue full-on. When we see the whole truth of who God is, we can rightfully discern what God is doing and how to fight the discouragement that comes when things seem unclear or confusing or even contrary to what should be. Author Meyers explains:

“Discouragement can be defeated only when the full truth of everything that is for us confronts and conquers the half-truth of fear and despair. When the full truth vanquishes those half-truths, our hearts will be comforted and strengthened. In other words,, we can “take heart.” The Bible does not pretend that problems are not there; it simply declares that there is more to see. The Christian life is a fight for sight. If all we see is what is against us, the shackles of discouragement will keep us confined to a prison of despair. Losing heart is easy when the chains of discouragement close tightly around our hearts and choke our hope. BUT, when we see that the One who is for us is greater than all that is against us, our chains will fall off and our hearts will be free to hope again.” (Jason Meyer, *Don't Lose Heart*, Baker books, 2019, pp. 14-15.) We will see what is really true and go forward in faith.

Put another way, **discouragement reigns when we lose sight of all that we have in Jesus.** When we lose sight of Jesus, we see only half the picture, we believe half-truths, and we are robbed of hope. But as believers, we are called to fight back...To live in terms of all we have and are in Christ. Christ in us is “the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). The fallen world we live in has many reasons to lose heart, but Jesus says to you and to me, ‘Take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn.16:33).p. 17.

So let me ask again: How do we live in terms of the sufficiency of all we are and have in Christ Jesus?

The Florida birds taught me an answer. A few mornings ago, I went outside to Bruce’s screened-in back porch – called a lanai in Florida. As I looked up into the sky, there was a flock of 20 birds soaring on the wind currents above me. I’m sure they were loving it. I saw that they had to initially flap their broad wings to rise up to reach the wind currents but then they weren’t exerting any effort. They were just gliding along from wind current to wind current, going with the flow of the wind. And they were doing it together, weaving in and out of each one’s soaring pattern. It was awesome to watch. I realized that the Holy Spirit has been called the Wind of God – you remember when the Spirit came at Pentecost it came as a rushing wind and tongues of fire and is the One who makes us soar in faith.

Two scriptures: Isaiah 40:28-31: Have you never heard?

Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

²⁹*He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.*

³⁰*Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion.*

³¹*But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (NLT)*

Beside these verses in my Bible I wrote “4 PhD Comprehensive exams 1991” in one week. And God sustained me and brought me through them all. I could soar on wings like eagles.

The other verse is in Acts 2:2 when the Holy Spirit comes down as a violent wind at Pentecost. The Spirit still is that wind and when we rise with our wings of faith, we can then soar, like those blackbirds, on the winds of the Spirit and let the Spirit guide our direction and choices.

We can rise ABOVE our discouragements. This is one of Meyer’s key insights: the power of discouragement lies in its half-truths. There ARE legitimate reasons for discouragement or anxiety, but the problem is that they do not encompass the whole truth of who God is or what God has promised.

Yet we yield to these perspectives as if they were the whole truth and the grace and power of God are irrelevant. In an example from the Israelites’ situation recounted in Isaiah 40, Meyer says: “God’s people were discouraged because they seemed so weak in comparison to the powerful nation that held them in captivity...They were comparing themselves to their captors instead of comparing their captors to their Savior” (pp. 32-33). Meyer’s insights provide the strong correctives God’s people need to counteract the epidemic of discouragement in our midst.

Remember, “Discouragement comes when we domesticate God...[And] Discouragement comes when we lose sight of all that we have in Jesus.” No matter what your circumstances might be right now, don’t lose sight of God. Don’t shrink him down to a human-sized scale. We lose heart when we borrow tomorrow’s trouble without also factoring in tomorrow’s mercies” (p.134).

So this new decade, let’s rise up with the wings of faith so we can ride the winds of the Spirit leading us step by step, from wind current to wind current. Let us fight for our sight, reframing all our circumstances in terms of God’s greatness, his power, his love and limitless grace. Then God will empower us to live truly in the sufficiency of Christ. May it be so – for all of us.

Amen. Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 1/19/20

The song of response that came when I was watching the soaring birds is The Power of Your Love. We will sing it now. The refrain is: Hold me close, let your love surround me. Bring me near, draw me to your side. And as I wait, I’ll rise up like the eagle, and I will soar with you, your Spirit leads me on in the power of your love.” Amen.