

PUT YOUR CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD

18 Ah, the land of whirring wings, [the land] that lies beyond the rivers of Ethiopia; ²[the nation] that sends ambassadors by sea in papyrus ships over the water. Go, swift messengers, go to a people who are tall with shining [dark skin], to a people who have been fearsome from their beginning until the present time—a powerful and aggressive nation whose land is divided by the rivers. ³[Listen,] all you inhabitants of the world and you who dwell on the earth. When a signal is given on the mountains, pay attention; and when the trumpet sounds, take heed; ⁴because this is what Jehovah has said to me, “I will remain quiet and observe from my dwelling place, like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of [the] harvest [season].” ⁵Before the harvest, when the blossom is gone and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and the spreading branches he will cut down and take away. ⁶They will all be left to the ravenous birds of the mountains and to the wild animals. The ravenous birds will feed on them all summer, and the [wild] animals all winter. ⁷At that time a people tall with shining [dark skin], a people who have been fearsome from their beginning until the present time, a powerful and aggressive nation whose land is divided by the rivers, will offer themselves [in homage] to Jehovah of hosts at the place where Jehovah of hosts has made his name known, Mount Zion. (Isa. 18:1-7)

Introduction

One day the LORD used nothing less than a silly goose to remind a Christian lady named Joyce of an important lesson.

Joyce found herself waiting for a green light at a busy intersection on a Friday evening during the 5 p.m. rush hour. As she sat there waiting for the light to turn, who should decide to cross that busy intersection but a goose! The goose waddled out into the street, she crossed one lane of oncoming traffic, and then another, now she crossed over the meridian with two lanes left to cross. The goose made it into the last lane as the light turned green, a speeding car missed her by two feathers, and then she finally made it safely to the other side of the intersection.

As Joyce watched this comical, but dangerous, escapade of the silly goose, she was reminded of a Scripture verse: *“Consider the birds of the air ... your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? ... ³⁴Therefore, do not be anxious”* (Matt. 6:26,34.) Joyce admitted to herself that she consistently frets and worries, she runs around in a panic most of the time, failing to demonstrate confidence in her heavenly Father, while that silly goose calmly waddles through a busy intersection without a care. (POWER, 5/10/92, p.8)

One day the LORD used His prophet, Isaiah, to teach a delegation of Ethiopian ambassadors the same important lesson about placing their confidence in the LORD. Way down the Nile River, south of Egypt, the Ethiopians heard of what the terrible armies of Assyria were doing up north: they were on the march, they had conquered

Syria, they were heading south. With a concern for the safety of their own nation, the Ethiopians now sent ambassadors to Jerusalem, hoping to enter into a mutual defense treaty with the nation of Judah. When they arrived at the capital city of Jerusalem, these ambassadors were intercepted by Isaiah who had a message for them from God. He informed them that the LORD is in control of the situation, so they are to turn around and go back home—placing their confidence in the LORD, the God of Israel, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Do we need to be reminded of the same lesson today? Do we fret and worry about potential problems (our health, our job, our retirement, our children, our future)? Do we panic when one of these potential problems materializes before our very eyes? We all need to be reminded of this important lesson: When we encounter a problem, especially one of great magnitude, rather than panic, we must put our confidence in the LORD.

I. Put Your Confidence in the LORD, ...Even though He may Be Still (Isa. 18:4)

In verse 4 the LORD declares, *“I will remain quiet and observe from my dwelling place, like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest season.”* The LORD compares His present silence to *“shimmering heat in the sunshine”* (like the heat silently rippling off of a desert highway in the noon day sun,) and to *“a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest season”* (like a wisp of cloud silently hanging over a meadow in the early morning.) In Isaiah 17:12 the nations are described as raging and roaring like the troubled sea: *“Oh, the uproar of multitudes of peoples! They roar like the roaring sea! And the raging of nations! They rage like the raging of mighty waters!”* But in contrast to the raging and roaring of the nations, the LORD assumes the position of majestic stillness; He is silently present, observing; sovereignly, although imperceptibly, in control.

Have you ever had such an experience in your life, a time when the LORD was silent? Perhaps you were confronted with a problem or a burden; you called upon the LORD, but the heavens appeared to be silent. Perhaps you can identify with a Christian lady named Kathy:

I pulled the curtain aside and gazed out the window at the road in front of my house. The large willow tree in my yard endorsed my mood with its weeping limbs.

There was no sign of my husband Andrew, who had left the house several hours earlier to take care of some paperwork associated with his three-month-old back injury. I let go of the curtain and sighed heavily before turning to flop down on the sofa in a disgusted heap.

For years Andrew had been the sole supporter of our household. We had grown accustomed to the security of his regular paychecks; but then he took

a tumble down his employer's unlit staircase. Suddenly, our provider was disabled with back pain, unable to work. The normalcy of daily life was replaced by frequent visits to doctors with worried-looking faces and dismal diagnoses.

I shuddered at the possibility that my husband's pain might never end, and I fearfully wondered how we would make ends meet. Would we join the growing ranks of homeless families? The uncertainty of the situation weighed heavily on me. My life seemed to be one big question mark. A sense of helplessness overwhelmed me.

"God," I moaned, "I'm so afraid. I don't know what to do. If Andrew can't work, how will we get by?"

The heavens appeared to be silent on the subject. I let my head fall into my hands as tears born of doubt and apprehension rolled from my eyes. (*POWER*, 7/22/90, pp.2-ff.)

Have you approached the throne of grace with a burden (maybe, like Kathy, your husband was out of work; maybe your wife was seriously ill,) and encountered the same silence as Kathy? If so, take heart from Isaiah 18:4, the LORD is silently present, observing; He is majestically, although perhaps imperceptibly, in control. On such occasions when we encounter the silence of the LORD, may we, by His grace, resolve to imitate the prophet Habakkuk, who wrote,

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸I will still rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. (Hab. 3:17-19)

Habakkuk expresses the confidence that the LORD will yet act and so cause the prophet to rejoice (vs. 18.) There is the confidence that the LORD will supply him with strength and grace (vs. 19.)

Let us put our confidence in the LORD, even though He may at present be silent. That Christian lady, Kathy, who encountered the silence of the LORD when she called upon Him, goes on to write: "I didn't know that God had begun to prepare an answer to my prayer even before it was uttered. ... in incredible ways, God has provided for our needs—even giving us enough to share with others." Let us claim as our own the words of Psalm 42:5,11;

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God ... ¹¹Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psl. 42:5,11)

II. Put Your Confidence in the LORD, ...Knowing that He will Act at the Proper Time (Isa. 18:5)

In verse 5 Isaiah directs our attention to the field of agriculture: *“Before the harvest, when the blossom is gone and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and the spreading branches he will cut down and take away.”* The farmer patiently watches over the vineyard. He watches the blossoms appear, and he waits. Then, when the flower has become a ripening grape, he acts—he cuts off the sprigs and brings in the harvest. Verse 5 is depicting the LORD’s miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army at just the right moment to save His people—presented in terms of a farmer lopping off the ripe clusters of grapes from the vines and discarding the branches. The point is that the LORD acts at the proper time—just as the farmer acts to bring in the harvest at the appointed time and no sooner.

Have you ever experienced such a time in your life when you had to wait for the LORD to act in His appointed time? Perhaps you had to undergo a period of divine silence. Perhaps you had to exercise patient confidence in the LORD: you found yourself placed in a situation where there was nothing you could do but wait for the LORD to act. Perhaps you prayed for a Christian spouse, but there were no eligible candidates in sight. Perhaps you were in need of a job, you sent out your resume, but there were no job offers. Perhaps your loved one lay sick, and there was nothing more the doctors could do. When we encounter such times and are called upon to wait upon the LORD to act in His time and as He sees fit, let us take to heart this word of Scripture found here in Isaiah 18:5, *“Before the harvest, when the blossom is gone and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and the spreading branches he will cut down and take away”*—like the farmer harvesting the grapes at the appointed season, so the LORD will act at the proper time.

Let us remember Joseph as he is described in Psalm 105:17b-19; *“Joseph was sold to be a servant. ¹⁸They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons. ¹⁹Until the time that his word was fulfilled, the word of Jehovah tested him.”* The LORD had made great promises to Joseph. But now Joseph found himself in a situation where all seemed lost (being held captive in an Egyptian prison;) all he could do was wait upon the LORD. Note: The LORD used this time to test Joseph and prepare him, and at the appointed time the LORD was faithful to act and fulfill all His promises to Joseph.

Let us put our confidence in the LORD, knowing that He will surely act at the proper time: *“Then Jehovah replied ... the revelation awaits the appointed time ... and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”* (Hab. 2:2a-3.) What was true with regard to this particular revelation given to Habakkuk may well be applied to all of God’s promises.

III. Put Your Confidence in the LORD, ...and He will Cause You to Praise His Name (Isa. 18:7)

The Ethiopian ambassadors are now sent home with the assurance that the LORD is in control, He will act at the proper time—and when He does, they will present themselves to Him as an act of thanksgiving and devotion: *At that time a people tall with shining [dark skin], a people who have been fearsome from their beginning until the present time, a powerful and aggressive nation whose land is divided by the rivers, will offer themselves in homage to Jehovah of hosts at the place where Jehovah of hosts has made his name known, Mount Zion.* (Isa. 18:7) The Ethiopians will be caused to praise the LORD for what He will do; the fulfillment of this promise is described in 2 Chronicles 32:20-23,

King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven ...²¹Then Jehovah sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. ...²²So Jehovah saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all others. He took care of them on every side. ²³Many brought offerings to Jerusalem for Jehovah and valuable gifts for Hezekiah king of Judah. From then on he was highly regarded by all the nations. (2 Chron. 32:20-23)

This is the guarantee that the Scriptures make to those who put their confidence in the LORD: *“Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame”* (Rom. 10:11.)

Let us put our confidence in the LORD, knowing that He will cause us to praise His name: *“On that day it shall be said, ‘Surely, this is our God; we have trusted in him, and he has saved us. This is Jehovah, we have trusted in him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation’”* (Isa. 25:9.)

Conclusion

Do you tend to fret and worry about potential problems? Do you tend to panic when those potential problems materialize into actual problems before your eyes? As Christians, we need to be reminded of this important lesson in everyday Christian living: We must put our confidence in the LORD.