

Hope vs. Discouragement

By Michael R. Winther

Are you discouraged by the current state of our nation? Are you frustrated by the direction of our government and political system? Are you discouraged by the condition of our culture? Very few Christians believe that there is any chance to positively transform our culture, our government or our world.

If you are a Christian; if you favor small, limited government; if you believe that there is absolute truth; if you believe in free enterprise; and if you favor liberty over the nanny state, then you may legitimately be discouraged by the condition of the world. You may feel that there is no hope. You may feel that the walls of statism, socialism, relativism, and atheism are impenetrable. It seems that our opponents have a fortified city that can't be conquered.

There is no reason to believe that a small minority who favor Biblical principles could defeat the entrenched and established institutions of education, media, business and government ...Or is there?

Wouldn't it be nice if we were a threat to evil? Would it surprise you then to learn that our philosophical adversaries actually fear us?

A short history lesson may be helpful here.

When the Israelites were first directed to conquer their enemies and take the Promised Land, they became fearful and shrunk from their duty. They allowed a handful of leaders (the spies) to discourage them. The result was 40 years of wandering in the desert. As we later discover, the very peoples who scared Israel into cowardice and disobedience were actually afraid of Israel. They had heard of the power of their God in bringing them out of Egypt. Joshua 2:9-11 records Rahab's words:

"I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below."

Forty years after the Exodus, this people still remembered the great deeds of God and they greatly feared Israel. It is quite likely that they had even greater fear 40 years earlier when Israel retreated from God's battle based on an intimidating report from all but two of the spies.

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The parallels to today cannot be missed. The New Testament tells us to attack the gates of Hell. We have been told to disciple the nations in all of God’s truth—not just some of it. But just like old Israel, we are being disheartened by evil reports. Our modern spies may be the Christian media, they may be the “conservative” media, or they may be our Christian leaders who tell us that the battle cannot be won... or even worse, that the battle ought not be fought at all.

If we don’t repent and then go to work, we will suffer years of wandering in the desert. The greater punishment could be that our generation would not be allowed to see God’s great works.

Common wisdom says that we certainly pose no threat to these multi-trillion dollar institutions that have a stranglehold on our world. But we ought not live by this “common wisdom.”

I suspect that while we are trembling in fear, wallowing in discouragement, and shrinking from the battle, our enemies are actually very concerned that we could actually prevail ...we just don’t know it.

The formula for 21st century success is easy. Just consider what the Israelites should have done the first time they prepared to enter Canaan. Almost any seasoned student of the Bible can identify what their actions should have been. Be humble, don’t trust in your own strength, have faith that the Lord can and will provide the victory, pray for God’s

blessing, then take action and be willing to apply all of your time, resources and blood to the battle.

Even when God provided the victory, it came with considerable cost to the Israelites. It cost them in resources and in blood. Remember that there were still casualties even in the most decisive of victories. It is hard to know whether our failure is from lack of faith or whether it is an unwillingness to make the necessary sacrifices. There is, of course, a relationship between faith and obedience. Without sufficient faith it is hard to be sacrificially obedient.

Why is it that things are so much clearer in retrospect? We look back at Israel and easily see their mistakes. It seems so very obvious to us as we look back in time. If we don’t correct our thinking, future generations will look back at us, just as we look back to old Israel, and wonder why we didn’t see the simple truth about our battles.

Here is what those future generations would tell us if they could: **we can be victorious if we only follow God’s formula. Humble ourselves, repent, trust the Lord, and go to battle.**

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