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TURN YOUR WORST DAY INTO YOUR BEST

Today's Text: 1 Sam. 30: 1-31; Acts 16: 19-40

Extracts:

1. **“And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag and burned it with fire. And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any... but carried them away, and went their way.... *Then David and the people that were with him lifted their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep... And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters; but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God*” [1 Sam. 30: 1,2,4,6]**
2. **“And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely; who ... thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed*” [Acts 16: 23-26]**

Life had not been easy for Eleanor {real names disguised}, a Nigerian housewife in the mid-west part of Nigeria. It was after ten years of marriage that she was able to bear her only child, a son. Thereafter, things appeared looking up. Her son got married and he and his wife, Judith, were expecting twins. The young couple had just moved into their own home, a small beautiful house in the city suburb. One day, Eleanor was at the weekday service in her church when the bad news came that her husband, son and daughter-in-law had been involved in a car accident on their way to pick her to come and see the new home. Her husband and only son had died on the spot but her daughter-in-law had been injured and rushed to the hospital. Eleanor rushed there in time to say goodbye to her daughter-in-law who died soon after a Caesarian section had been done to remove the twin boy and girl alive. There and then, Eleanor named the children “Iyayi” (“I believe”) and “Akonjeh” (“I can smile again”). They later became a successful medical doctor and a lawyer respectively and the evening of Eleanor's life became better than she could have imagined.

In most parts of the world today, economic and political conditions have worsened. Unemployment and inflation, floods and droughts, war and wickedness, and every kind of hardship are being inflicted on people. Many have lost hope. Many have considered suicide and some have actually done it. However, there are also many who have decided to fight their way to victory, hanging on the hope that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” [Ps. 30:5]. Like Eleanor, you can turn your worst day into your best. Let us find out in today's lesson how that can be done.

1. Background: Fugitive David loses his whole family in one day!

David finally realized that no part of Israel was safe for him, and he “said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines, and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand” [1 Sam. 27: 1]. David crossed the national boundary with 600 of his men and members of their families. King Achish of Gath granted him a ‘resident visa’ and gave him the town of Ziklag which David, his men and their families called home for the next sixteen months. So, when Saul was informed that David had escaped his jurisdiction, he stopped pursuing him [vv. 2-7].

Considering that the Philistines were sworn enemies of the people of Israel and it was David who had killed their giant, Goliath, would you consider it a wise move? The answer can be “yes” and “no.” Saul stopped pursuing him. That was an immediate positive development. Secondly, since David was a man of faith, his move could not have been in flesh.

You will recall that earlier, when he fled from Saul who had pursued him to the home of the priest, Ahimelech, David found himself in the custody of the same Achish “and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath.” So, David pretended to be mad. He “scrabbled on the doors of the gate and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad; wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men?” [1 Sam. 21: 10-15]. So, if the same David had now of his own volition gone to Achish for protection, it was God’s doing. This position is supported by scripture, where God told Isaiah, “Woe to the rebellious children...that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at My mouth, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!” [Is. 30: 1-2]. When Herod threatened the life of infant Jesus, God instructed Joseph to take Him to Egypt for protection [Matt. 2: 13-15]. Therefore, when God sanctions moving into enemy territory, He will make it a peaceful coexistence [Prov. 16:7].

However, every decision has a prize and a price. For David, the prize was protection against Saul. The price was that he now had to serve the Philistines. On behalf of Achish, David conquered large territories belonging to the Geshurites, the Gezrites and the Amalekites, even to the land of Egypt, among others [1 Sam. 27: 8-12]. In the process, he made new enemies for himself.

The next battle challenged David’s loyalty to Achish on the one hand and to his own country, Israel, on the other. Left to David, he was prepared to fight for the Philistines and Achish had accepted his offer. However, the generals of the Philistine army refused, remembering David’s role in the death of their giant, Goliath. Reluctantly, therefore, Achish had to refuse David’s offer. David then took his men and returned to Ziklag [1 Sam. 29: 1-11].

On their return to Ziklag, David and his men found that their town had been sacked and burnt by the Amalekites, perhaps by some new enemies that he had made in the land of the Philistines. Their wives and children had been taken captives but nobody knew to where they had been taken [1 Sam. 30: 1-3]. What a red-letter day! How would you feel to find yourself in that kind of situation? Everything that you had worked for in life all gone in one flash! It could be the death of the breadwinner or children, sibling or dear friend or colleague, failure in the final or qualifying examination, fire, divorce, natural disaster, terrorist attack, etc. What a disaster because you are not even bold enough to think of the next moment, not to talk of the future.

In a matter of a few days, Job who was reputed to be the greatest man in the then Eastern world, lost seven sons and three daughters, seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, among other animals, and all his real estates. He was left alone with a shell-shocked wife and his faith-threatened self [Job 1: 6-19]. Jehosaphat woke up one morning only to discover that stronger enemies from Moab and Amon had surrounded him on all sides, and they were already a short distance away in Engedi [2 Chron. 20: 1-2]. For preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul and Silas were thoroughly beaten and imprisoned as troublemakers. They were put in the maximum-security section of the prison where their hands and feet were firmly chained [Acts 16: 22-24].

2. Dealing with a sad day

For David, Job, Jehosaphat, Paul and Silas, what day could be worse? How did David handle his worst day that he later turned into his best day? Let us study the *process* that David followed:

a) *Don't bottle up the tears!*

When David and his men came and found their camp in ruins and family members gone, they “lifted up their voice and *wept until they had no more power to weep*” [1 Sam. 30: 4]. What are we supposed to do with the tears that God has supplied in abundance to our eyes? To shed them, of course! Researchers agree that it is better to let the tears flow than to bottle them up. When Jesus was told that Lazarus was sick, He did not rush to go and heal him. By the time He came to Bethany, where Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, lived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Sympathizers were around them and the two ladies were mourning their dead brother. What did Jesus do? Of course, He knew that He was going to raise Lazarus back to life. Yet, He wept [Jn 11: 1-35]!

So, it is not lack of faith to feel the pains of your worst day. What is important is what you do with those feelings. While David's men despaired and wanted to stone him, “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God” [1 Sam. 30: 6]. When Jehosaphat received the report of

the massive invasion, he “feared and set himself to seek the Lord” [2 **Chron. 20: 3**]. Therefore, we should feel free to express our pains, provided we anchor them on God. From the names that Eleanor gave to her grandchildren in our opening story, she certainly anchored her grief on her God for “the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry” [Ps. 34: 15].

b) *Seek God’s guidance*

David knew that their wives and children could still be alive. However, he did not know where they were or how to find them. So, he turned to the Lord. “And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt *surely* overtake them, *and without fail recover all*” [1 **Sam. 30: 7-8**]. With such assurance, David could then dry up his tears, for as David himself once prayed when the Philistines first took him to their king, Gath, “put Thou my tears into Thy bottle” [Ps. 56: 8]. When Moses and the children of Israel were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian troops, he sought God’s guidance and in response God told Moses to stretch his rod over the waters. The sea opened up and the people crossed over by foot [Ex. 14: 13-22]! Paul and Silas “prayed and sang praises unto God” and He broke off the chains from their hands and feet [Acts 16: 25-26]! Jehosaphat and his people fasted and prayed and there in their midst, God spoke through a prophet that God would fight for them [2 **Chron. 20: 14-15**]!

Some of us go to psychologists and therapists for relief but they cannot help you because they cannot see beyond their notes and the size of your pockets! Instead, go to God and let Him show you how to get out of your worst day.

c) *Do as God leads you*

Remember, God did not tell David where to find the captives. Therefore, he now had to exercise the authority that God had granted him, namely, not the “spirit of fear, but of *power, and of love and of a sound mind*” [2 **Tim. 1:7**]. Let us closely observe what David did:

- He took 600 men. By the time they came to the brook Besor, 200 of them were too weak to continue. David was not angry with them. After all, only David was called by God to serve as the next king of Israel! He left them to quench their thirst in the brook [1 **Sam. 30: 9-10**].
- As they searched the field beyond the brook, they found an Egyptian who could hardly talk from three days of hunger and thirst. David gave him food and drink until the young man

regained his strength [vv. 11-12]. Most of us would not have time for such a “distraction” but in the words of Jesus, “inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” [Matt. 25:40]. Out of selfishness and lack of charity, many of us have missed the abundant blessings that we are daily searching for!

- It was this Egyptian, who turned out to have been abandoned by his Amalekite master because he had fallen sick, that showed David and his men the exact location of the Amalekites and their captives [1 Sam. 30: 13-15].
- Over a whole day [from one evening to the evening of the next day], David fought and defeated the Amalekites, except 400 young men who escaped on their camels [vv. 16-17].
- David recovered his wives and children as well as those of his men. In addition, all the loot that the Amalekites had taken from the Philistines now belonged to David and his men [vv. 18-20]!
- David shared equally all the flocks of sheep and cattle to reach not only the 400 men who had helped him in the battle but also the 200 who fell by the wayside and the elders of Judah and all of David’s friends [vv. 20-24]!
- This show of charity and love stood David in good stead when the time came to anoint a successor to Saul. The people of Judah unanimously made David their king [2 Sam. 2:4]!

We see from the forgoing that within a day, David turned an apparent tragedy into a major victory. He had turned his worst day into his best.

3. Lessons

Many of us are under the mistaken impression that because God is good all the time, that believers should not have sad moments! However, a good thing may not necessarily be only sweet or happy as the following scripture suggests:

For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?... Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby [Heb. 12: 6, 7, 11]

Bad things do happen to good people. However, good people are expected to turn such bad things into better things for “many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” [Ps. 34:19]. So, when you find yourself in one of those days that you can count as your worst, you can turn things around for the better as follows:

- a) Don't regard it as lack of faith to feel the pain. Jesus openly admitted in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He then invited Peter, James and John to "tarry ye here, and watch with Me" [Matt. 26: 38]. Luke's Gospel added, "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, *strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*" [Lk 22: 43-44].
- b) However, your cry should not be a hopeless type. Instead, you should put the matter in God's hands. Jesus prayed, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; *nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done*" [Lk 22: 42]. While Paul and Silas responded to their situation by praying and praising God, Jehosaphat declared a fast. King Hezekiah received a letter of threat of attack from the king of Assyria. He went into the temple and spread it before the Lord and prayed, "save Thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only" [2 Kgs 19: 14-20]. In all these cases, God's response was prompt and strong.
- c) God needs your cooperation for Him to turn your worst day into your best. Therefore, while you are waiting *for* the Lord, you must also be waiting *on* Him. Your trust in Him must radiate in your response to tragedy and encourage others to trust in your God. Shadrach, Meshac and Abednego demonstrated so much faith in their God that when the fire failed to burn them, king Nebuchadnezzar made a decree "that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut in pieces" [Dan. 3: 14-30].
- d) Sometimes, this cooperation may only require that you be still and allow God to do it. As the brethren were praying for Peter who was in prison pending execution by Herod, Peter was fast asleep, chained to 16 soldiers [Acts 12: 1-8]! The rescuing angel had to hit him hard to bring him awake!

Today is the beginning of the rest of your life. Make everyday count as if it were your last. Would you not like your last day to be your best? Can you afford it not to be? So, cheer up and smile over your difficulties. All shall be well!