

01-29-2012

The Story

Seeing God's Plan In Your Life

Pt 4: Seeing Beyond the Immediate In Your Life

We've never done a 31 week sermon series here before but we are in the midst of one right now. It's called The Story and it is an overview of the Bible, hitting all of the major points from Genesis to Revelation.

Since it's such a long series, we've broken it down into a bunch of shorter series within the larger one. Today we are finishing up a four part series titled, "Seeing God's Plan In Your Life."

The reality of life is that everyone goes through tough times at different times in their lives. No one is immune.

It could be severe health issues, devastating financial issues, heartbreaking marriage problems, enormous career challenges, the tragic death of a loved one, the ongoing battle with some form of addiction or any number of other critical issues.

Matthew 5:45 Jesus said, "...He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

As I've said before, Jesus is not giving a weather report here. He's pointing out that we all have rain in our life, we all go through storms in life, we all face tough times in life.

How does one get through the severe tough times? One of the keys is to learn to see beyond the immediate.

At this point in our series of The Story: The nation of Israel was at a point in their history where they were going through a NIGHTMARE of a situation.

As we discussed two weeks ago: Israel had been invaded and conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Most of those who had not been killed had been carried off into captivity.

In light of this: How in the world could they not just give up all hope? How could they not be completely devastated by despair?

God did them a great favor.
God gave Israel a vision of the future.

He allowed them to see beyond the immediate.

When you first read this vision you might think it is some really weird stuff. But after it is explained, hopefully you understand it and it makes sense. In fact, it's a very profound vision.

Let's take a look at it:

Ezekiel 37:1-10

- 1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.
- 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.
- 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know."
- 4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!'"
- 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.
- 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."
- 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.
- 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.
- 9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"
- 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet — a vast army.

So the prophet Ezekiel has a vision from God about all of these bones. They are described as being very dry - in other words, they have been there a long time.

But what does it all mean? How would you interpret this dream? We don't have to guess, we don't have to speculate, we don't have to theorize....because the Bible tells us exactly what it all means!

Look at the next two verses:

Ezekiel 37:11-12

- 11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'"
- 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.'

God is telling the nation of Israel that they will not always be captives in a foreign land, they will not always be slaves, God will once again deliver them and bring them back to the Promised Land.

Even though they think that as a nation they are dead, the truth is, they are not dead. They will live again as a nation in Israel.

If you read in the book of Nehemiah and in the book of Ezra, this very prophecy IS fulfilled! The people of Israel do indeed return to the promised land.

It is this knowledge of the promised return, it is this hope, it is this vision beyond the immediate that sustains them through their challenging days as slaves in a foreign country.

When we learn to see beyond the immediate, then we too can survive the tremendous challenges that life sometimes throws at us.

In order to see beyond the immediate, we need to change our focus.

1. Focus on your faith!

When you are going through some tough times, when you are facing some of the big challenges that life throws into your path, when you feel that your back is against the wall.....that's the time to focus on your faith!

Now, please understand, I'm not suggesting that you turn a blind eye towards your problems. It doesn't mean you just bury your head in the sand.

But it does mean that you sharpen or you intensify your focus upon your faith.

That's why the Apostle Paul said,
2 Corinthians 5:7 "We live by faith, not by sight."

This doesn't mean that you all of the sudden have all the answers to life's problems. It means that you move forward in spite of your problems. That is what your faith is all about.

Let me illustrate what I mean:

After 31 ½ years of marriage I am more certain than ever of my love for Lisa. But let me let you in on a little secret: there are still times that I don't completely understand her. But isn't that what love is all about?

Likewise, after 40 plus years of being a Christian, I am more certain than ever of the Lord's presence in my life, even though I don't completely understand it! But isn't that what faith is all about?

"We live by faith, not by sight."

Don't become a slave to your circumstances. Rise above your challenges. Focus on your faith instead of your problems.

Don't be defeated, be victorious.

1 John 5:4-5

4 “Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

It is your faith in Jesus Christ that gives you victory over the challenges of life.

1 Corinthians 15:57 “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

To see beyond the immediate begins by focusing on your faith.

2. Focus on the facts!

Satan wants to defeat us and one of his tricks is to get us totally focused on the immediate to such an extent that we would begin to question our faith. In response, we need to remember the facts of our faith.

Jesus encouraged his followers to focus on the facts, or the evidence, of their faith in Him:

John 14:11 Jesus said, “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”

Jesus said, “Hey, look at the evidence, look at the facts.”
There are many facts to substantiate your faith!

John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Later on in the Gospel of John we read:
John 20:30-31

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The Apostle John says that these miracles are recorded, these facts of history are recorded, so that you would have faith in Jesus.

When you hit one of those rough patches in your life, sometimes it helps to not only focus on your faith, but to focus on the facts that substantiate your faith.

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”

All these things that Jesus did wasn't just some Hollywood production or a Las Vegas lounge act or some contrived reality show. They are historical evidences, they are historical facts which substantiate the reasons for our faith in Jesus.

I like what Billy Graham wrote about this:

"There is more historical evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived or that Alexander the Great died at the age of 33. It is strange that historians accept thousands of facts for which they can produce only shreds of evidence. But in the face of overwhelming evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ they cast a skeptical eye and hold intellectual doubts. The trouble with those people is that they do not want to believe."

- Billy Graham, Peace with God

Sometimes your faith is bolstered when you remember the facts that support that faith. Sometimes you simply need to focus more intently on the facts of your faith.

3. Focus on your future!

God gave Israel a vision of the future through the illustration of dead bones coming back to life. God has given us a vision of the future as well! The Bible repeatedly tells us that Jesus Christ is going to return! The Bible makes it very clear that those who are in Christ will have an incredible home in heaven. We have a great future!

Look at what Jesus said in the Gospel of John:

John 14:2-3

2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Sometimes there are some challenges in this life, sometimes there are even some very painful experiences we go through in this life, but if we focus on the future we remember that the reward is great at the end.

Just like a lady who is having labor pains before delivering her child. Is there anyone here who has recently experienced the agony of labor pains?

(You knew I was going to work that in, didn't you!)

It is an incredibly painful experience to have a baby.

(I've never had a baby so I don't know this from personal experience, but from very reliable sources!)

Even though it may seem like it at the moment, the pain doesn't last forever.

Many a women in the midst of labor pains has cried out, "I'm NEVER having another child!"

And yet, they do. Why? Because the love of their child is far greater than the pain they endured.

They see beyond the immediate.

Some of the challenges in life, some of the tragedies in life, some of the pains we experience in life are just a little bit easier to navigate if we can see beyond the immediate by focusing on the future.

Let me close with this: (This is in your future)

Revelation 21:1-5

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

If you want to be a part of that heavenly experience, the key is your relationship to Jesus Christ.

Have you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?