

VICTORY IN THE VALLEYS OF LIFE

INTRO: I want to talk to us this morning about those times of life when we go through the valley. I suppose it is with you like it is with me, that every once in a while you go through a low time, a time in one of the valleys of life. It is for several weeks now I thought I would like to do a message to encourage us, as we, as strangers and pilgrims on this earth make our way through some of the more difficult times of life. As I was thinking about that some time ago the words of the song writer Lynda Randle kept coming back to my mind. I understand she wrote the song, "The God of The Mountains." And I expect she got the idea of her song from 1 Kings 20, an account that takes place in the history of the kings of Israel.

After Israel's first king, Saul, David took the throne and he established the kingdom. After him, Solomon ruled. And after Solomon's strong rule, the kingdom was divided into the northern kingdom of 10 tribes and the southern kingdom of 2 tribes. Both the northern and the southern kingdom had 20 kings. Of the 20 kings of the southern kingdom, there were 8 good kings. Of the kings of the northern kingdom there were no good kings.

Well, the story of the account I want to tell you about this morning comes from 1 Kings 20. It is one account in the life of king Ahab who was the son of Omri. And Ahab is the eighth king of the northern kingdom. Besides having received his kingdom from a bad heritage, he had a godless wife. Her name was Jezebel. She was the daughter of the king of Tyre, who had been a priest of Astarte, before that. And I understand that through this woman, he gendered close associations with the Phoenicians, which also did him no good spiritually. All in all, there seemed to be very little chance for Jehovah God to gain His rightful place in the life of this king, and thus in Israel, who is pictured as the Lord's idolatrous wife. At the time recorded in 1 Kings 20, Israel's idolatry is in full bloom.

Well, up until Ahab became king, the northern kingdom's greatest offenses to God were the golden calves made by their first king after Solomon in Dan and Bethel. But now in the reign of Ahab, after his marriage to Jezebele, the worship of the Phoenician cults will further ensnare Israel.

Well, Jehovah God, who is jealous of His adulterous wife, has tried by some very strong measures to get the attention of King Ahab. The most recent was when Elijah challenged, and then did away with some 450 prophets of Baal. These were prophets who ate at Jezebell's table. And now, once more, Jehovah God will try to reveal Himself to Ahab and Israel.

And may He, in this account, reveal Himself to each one of us as the God whom we can trust anywhere, anytime, and with anything. Maybe this morning, you need just such a word as this. Maybe there are those among us who need to rededicate themselves to Jehovah God, from down in the valley.

I. THE ACCOUNT

Now I want to read the story and comment as we go. So let us now turn to 1 Kings 20 and begin reading at verse 1. **1 Now Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his forces together; thirty-two kings were with him, with horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria, and made war against it.** Syria is the country of which Bassar al Assad is president today and he is in big trouble right now if you watch the news. Well Ben-Hadad gathered all his forces together the king of Israel, king Ahab is the one he is going after. And now, all around Samaria are the encampments of Benhadad's army.

So verse 2 says... **2 Then he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, and said to him, "Thus says Ben-Hadad: 3 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your loveliest wives and children are mine.'" 4 And the king of Israel answered and said, "My lord, O king, just as you say, I and all that I have are yours."** When Ahab saw the kind of trouble he was in, he agreed to send Ben-Hadad all that he requested. It is a huge price, but to Ahab it must have seemed worth it in light of the trouble he was in.

5 Then the messengers came back and said, "Thus speaks Ben-Hadad, saying, 'Indeed I have sent to you, saying, "You shall deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children"; 6 'but I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants. And it shall be, that whatever is pleasant

in your eyes, they will put it in their hands and take it.'" Well, things have gotten out of hand a little too much even for Ahab, a rather weak king. So our text says... **7 So the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, "Notice, please, and see how this man seeks trouble, for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not deny him." 8 And all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent."**

Well, when you read an account like this you do not get all the details, but Ahab now changes his mind about his agreement with Ben-Hadad. So our text goes on in verse... **9 Therefore he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'All that you sent for to your servant the first time I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'**" And the messengers departed and brought back word to him. **10 Then Ben-Hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me, and more also, if enough dust is left of Samaria for a handful for each of the people who follow me." 11 So the king of Israel answered and said, "Tell him, 'Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off.'**"

This is rather big talk for a man who is in big trouble. He is saying, "Listen, don't act like you have won this thing already! So our text says in verse 12... **12 And it happened when Ben-Hadad heard this message, as he and the kings were drinking at the command post, that he said to his servants, "Get ready." And they got ready to attack the city.**

It is here that Jehovah God steps into this picture and a big change takes place in the drama before us. Our text now says in verse 13... **13 Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'**" Now there is a notable point made here. From these words it is clear why God intervened. He wanted to demonstrate to Ahab that He, Jehovah God, was God! He wanted Ahab to learn that all the other gods he was serving were not real gods. He alone was God Almighty!

Verse 14 then says... **14 So Ahab said, "By whom?" And he said, "Thus says the LORD: 'By the young leaders of the provinces.'**" Then he said, "Who will set the battle in order?" And he answered, "You." Ahab's question is by whom the Lord will deliver Ben-Hadad's army into his hands. And the amazing answer is that God will do it by the young leaders of the provinces! Now nobody seems to be sure who these young leaders were. But what is of note is that it will be young leaders. You do not send young leaders to battle a huge experienced army! But God, I think, wants to reveal Himself to Ahab in such a way that it will be unmistakable that Jehovah God is God. And then Ahab said, "Who will be the army general? Who will order the battle?" And God said, "You!" A weak king is to order the battle, and inexperienced leaders are to direct the army! God wants Ahab to see first hand who God is.

Our text then goes on like this in verse... **15 Then he mustered the young leaders of the provinces, and there were two hundred and thirty-two; and after them he mustered all the people, all the children of Israel—seven thousand.** Some have speculated that these are the 7,000 God told Elijah about that had not bowed their knees to Baal, when Elijah thought he was the only true believer left. Most think, however, that this is not likely the case. However that may be, to go against this vast army with a weak king, young leaders and only 7,000 soldiers is something like David going against Goliath with a sling and a stone. Unless Jehovah God steps in, this battle will be no show.

Our text now says in verse... **16 So they went out at noon. Meanwhile Ben-Hadad and the thirty-two kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post. 17 The young leaders of the provinces went out first. And Ben-Hadad sent out a patrol, and they told him, saying, "Men are coming out of Samaria!" 18 So he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; and if they have come out for war, take them alive."** Ben-Hadad is all relaxed. It seems to me that Ben-Hadad thinks that since these men are coming in the afternoon, there is no threat. No army in their right mind would think they could take him in an

afternoon battle! So he will have thought that this would not mean war.

Furthermore, so sure is he of victory that he does not take the fact that there are men coming from Samaria seriously. So verse 19 says... **19 Then these young leaders of the provinces went out of the city with the army which followed them.** Commentators do not have much to say here, as though it is unimportant. Yet it seems to me very strange that the young men went first. Was not Ahab to order the battle? Would he not have been at the front?

Well, the outcome of the battle is recorded for us like this in verse 20... **20 And each one killed his man; so the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them; and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the cavalry.** Now notice when this very brave king, Ahab enters the battle. It is after the young men have made this huge army flee. So verse 21 says... **21 Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter.**

And now, once more the prophet of God comes to Ahab with a message. We come to it in verse 22.) **22 And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, "Go, strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you."**

Well, back in the Syrian camp a new theory has arisen among Ben-Hadad's servants. We find it in verses 23-25. **23 Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will be stronger than they. 24 "So do this thing: Dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places; 25 "and you shall muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain; surely we will be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so.**

Well, the very next spring of the year, when kings go to war, Syria once more encamps around Samaria. We

begin in verse 26... **26 So it was, in the spring of the year, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. 27 And the children of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went against them. Now the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside.** Now there is the picture of David and Goliath. Israel looks like two little flocks of goats, but the countryside is filled with Syrian soldiers!

Enter, once more, the prophet of God. And he has a message for Ahab in verse 28... **28 Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, "Thus says the LORD: 'Because the Syrians have said, "The LORD is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys," therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'**" You see, the Syrians have said that Israel's God is a God of the mountains. But He is not a God of in the valley. So, they will fight in the valley. Surely, in the valley they will win. And God said something very interesting. He told Ahab that because the Syrians believed that He was a God of the Mountains, but not a God in the valleys, He said, "... therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand and YOU, Ahab, not THEY, the Syrians, shall know that I am the LORD."

Our text now goes on to record what happened... **29 And they encamped opposite each other for seven days. So it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined; and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day. 30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left. And Ben-Hadad fled and went into the city, into an inner chamber.** Now we must stop reading there. After this Ahab, that wicked unbeliever makes blunder after blunder. But God has shown Himself to be God, whether on the mountains or in the valley.

II. THE APPLICATION

Now we want to apply this text to ourselves. God wants us to find out by experience that He is God,

both in our high times and in our low times. And we need to be aware that the devil, who stood behind the Syrian army will come to us when we are down in the valley. And there, in the valley he will attack us. Yes, he does from time to time, attack us when we are high. Not all is safe on the mountain top. We must trust God there just as well as in the valley. But it is in the valley the devil does his dirtiest work. When we are up on the mountain, he waits for us down in the valley. He knows that sooner or later we will be there, and then when we are down in the valley, he attacks us with all ferocity.

Now I do not know much about Lynda Randle, who wrote the song, "The God of the Mountain". She professes to have become a Christian at 12 years of age and she and her husband are both in ministry. She wrote a song that speaks of mountain and valley experiences. Her song may well have come from this passage. If not, it certainly illustrates it. It goes like this:

Life is easy when you're up on the mountain,
And you've got peace of mind like you've never known;
But things change when you're down in the valley.
Don't lose faith, for you're never alone.

You talk of faith when you're up on the mountain.
Talk comes easy when life's at its best.
Now down in the valley of trials and temptations;
That's when faith is really put to the test.

For the God of the mountains is still the God in the valley;
When things go wrong, He'll make them right.
The God of the good times, is still God in the bad times;
The God of the day, is still God in the night.

Anybody that comes to any age in life and is normal in their thinking capacities, finds that life has its mountain tops and it has valleys. Anyone who becomes a born again Christian, finds that this is true for the Christian as well as anyone else. And if you are like I am, I have never yet gotten used to the valleys. Every time I get down there, I want out. Every time I really get down, it feels like I will never come out again.

In John Bunyan's allegorical story of the Christian life, "Pilgrim's Progress" Christian arrives at a hill called, "the Hill Difficulty". It was a very difficult hill. There were other paths that looked

better but Pilgrim knew the difficult way, the upward was the right one. And because it is difficult and leads up, it also leads to a mountain top experience. Well, it was difficult and it had its dangers, but it led towards the heavenly city. Thus, the Hill Difficulty eventually led him to a mountain top experience and it was glorious. At the top of the hill, every difficulty was worth it, for here he came to the Porter's Lodge. And here he had a most wonderful experience. This was life on the mountain top! And here he stayed for some days, just glorying in the goodness of the mountain top experience. But, as it must be, every mountain top must give way to the next valley. And it was here, and the folk of the Porter's Lodge took him to the housetop and from there, way in the distance he saw the most beautiful mountains called 'the Delectable Mountains.' And he was told that what was in sight was Immanuel's land. And they said that when he got to that land, from there he would be able to see the celestial city, the city of his destination, and which we might call heaven or paradise.

But, between the mountaintop where he was now, and the delectable mountains was a very great valley, called the valley of humiliation. And through this valley he must go. And as he set out, three people from this place, Discretion, Piety and Prudence escorted him to the hill. And Christian said, "As it was difficult coming up, so, so far as I can see, it is dangerous going down." And Prudence said, "Yes, so it is; for it is a hard matter for a man to go down the Valley of Humiliation, as thou art now, and to catch no slip by the way." And it says that as Christian went down, he caught a slip or two.

Now here is how the chapter on the Valley of Humiliation starts, "But now, in this Valley of Humiliation, poor Christian was hard put to it; for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him: his name is Apollyon. Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground." Well, the account is lengthy. But here in the valley, Christian met Apollyon in most treacherous ways. Now it is interesting that Bunyan names the devil in the valley, Apollyon. One time the

devil is called that in the Bible. It is Revelation 9:11. And Bunyan calls the devil Apollyon in the valley because this name means, 'the destroyer'. Here in the valley, he sets about to destroy the believer. And the devil did the most horrible things to Christian down in the valley. For instance, he caused Christian to think that he, Christian, was a blasphemer. And many other devices he used to try to turn Christian back. The valley was a dreadful experience, but to reach the celestial city, there was no other way but through.

And then, as if that was not enough, because Christian kept going, this valley that had been deep enough, now got deeper. There are some folk for whom the valleys take a number of levels downward. And I ask you, is God, Jehovah God, the God of the Bible, is He the God of the valleys as well as the mountain tops? Oh yes He is! But the bigger question is: will we trust Him, even in the deep valleys?

Maybe the whisper of Apollyon, the destroyer comes to us in the valley, "You know there is really no use in reading the Bible. Oh, it's good when you're on the mountain. But when life gets real, and you're in the valley, you know its no real use." Maybe he attacks you about your prayer life. And maybe he attacks you about yourself. "You're no good. You will never be any good for anything. When you get down here, you know its so. You will never count for anything." And there, in the valley, we are tempted to believe the lies of the devil. How many have left the path altogether because their pathway led into the valley. Christian met such in his journey. They were running the other way because of the fearful things they had met.

And then, right there in the valley, is our opportunity to die, and Christ's opportunity to live in us, if we will but yield to Him in faith. You see, God does not need much to make us useful servants, even when we think we don't have anything to offer. And then the Lord, in His great grace, comes along, like He did to Moses. And he said, "What is that in your hand?" And Moses said, "A rod." That was all God needed for him. God called Gideon to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Midianites. And Gideon used

every trick in the book to get out of this. He said, "You've got it wrong Lord, I'm not Your man." God won. And Gideon gathered an army together. And God said, "You've got too many soldiers." So he reduced his army from 22,000 to 10,000. And God said, "That is still too many." Then God reduced his army again, and there were only 300 left. And then, with a mere 300 men, God gave Gideon the victory. Do you know why God did that? So that Gideon would know it was the Lord that gave the victory! From the Bible we should know that with God it is not big numbers; it is not a big name; it is not how high the mountain or how deep the valley; it is not how big the trouble; and it is not how dark the night; it is our faith in Him. There is no valley so deep; no trouble so big; no night so dark, that God will not be God there with us, if we trust Him.

You see, with God, a rod is enough. With God numbers don't matter. With God, valleys don't matter. With God, when things go wrong, it doesn't change His abilities. He is omnipotent. With God, bad times only encourage a miracle for the trusting heart. With God, the night is light. So the song writer said,

For the God of the mountains is still the God in the valley;
When things go wrong, He'll make them right.
The God of the good times, is still God in the bad times;
The God of the day, is still God in the night.

I want to tell you something, there is victory for the Christian in the valley. And it is worth knowing as well, that without the valley experiences that we get in life, we could never truly mature as Christians. Some of us would help a butterfly out of the cocoon. Some of us would help a chick out of the hard shell. But God is wiser. He does not help us out of the valley, He takes us through! God tests our faith for genuineness, and the valley is one of those places He finds out and we find out just how much we are willing to trust Him. I would dare to say that if we had only mountain top experiences, or even just a few too many; we would easily be ruined. And we would never truly know if we are genuine Christians. When we learn that He is not only a God of the mountain tops, but the God of the valleys, then true Christian victory has come.

III. THE ADVICE

A. Trust God In The Valley - Never Say Die

And now I want to give a few brief words of advice for the valley. First, it goes without saying that we must learn to trust God in the valley. God can and will take you through the darkest of valleys, if you will but trust Him. You can trust Him when all seems dark. You can trust Him when all the gauges on your computer scream disaster. You can trust Him when your compass says south, and you think it is north. There is no place you cannot trust Him.

B. Don't Trust Your Feelings

Second, do not trust your feelings. Nothing will give you a bigger roller coaster Christian life experience than your feelings, and they are not nearly all exhilarating. Always go by the word. Always go by facts. When your feelings and the facts are a variance, do not trust your feelings. And then, if you listen carefully, right there in the deepest part of the valley, you will hear God say, "I have brought you here that you might know that I am the Lord."

One of our young men is working on his pilot's license. I chatted with him briefly about flying in a storm. And in a storm, when you cannot see anything, and the storm has you all over the place, you have to trust your instruments. If you go by your feelings and you do not trust the instruments, you are a dead man. In our spiritual journey, the Bible is all the instruments we need.

C. Don't Make Major Decisions in the Valley

Third, I encourage, if at all possible, when you are in the valley, free yourself from making any major decisions when at all possible. When you recognize that you are down in the valley, free yourself from all major decisions. Say, "If there are decisions to be made, I will make them when I can see clearly."

D. Learn To Rejoice In The Valley

Fourth, learn to rejoice in the Lord. Now let me first tell you what rejoicing in the Lord is not. It is not putting on a happy face when every muscle is pulling the other way. It is nothing forced. It is rejoicing 'in the Lord'. There is no valley so deep that you and I do not have things to rejoice about in the Lord. The more we learn to know about Him, the more we can rejoice in Him. We can rejoice that we know Him from the Word, and that He is just and holy and on and on. Every attribute of God is a matter for rejoicing.

Then we can rejoice in what God has provided for us in our wonderful country, and our wives or husbands or children; our health etc... etc... etc... You might have to use a little force on yourself here and say, "No, I will not feel sorry for myself. Yes, there are many wonderful things to rejoice about. And no, I will not think all those negative things. I will rejoice in the Lord."

E. Do Something For Somebody In Need

My wife has a good friend. When she gets down, she checks to see whom she knows that could use some encouragement or a bowl of soup, and then, no matter how she feels, she sets about doing that. And while we are busy about some of these things, as sure as the weather changes, our valley will come to an end. Sometimes, all of a sudden you see a light at the end of the tunnel, and no, its not the banker looking for you with a flashlight, it's not a train coming the other way either. It is the end of the valley! On the other side there is sunshine for the soul.

CONCL:

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Talk comes easy when life's at its best.
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