

THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part twelve

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HOW FAITH AND SIN ARE EACH GENERATED BY WHERE OUR HOPE IS PLACED (Part 2) - Pride

Psalm 33:13-22 - "The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; [14] from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, [15] he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. [16] The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. [17] The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. [18] Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, [19] that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. [20] Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. [21] For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. [22] Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you."

It's interesting the way this text equates *fearing* God with *hoping in his steadfast love* - "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love...." (33:18). So *fearing* God is not merely trembling before Him. It is remembering to *include* Him in the securing of my life. More than that, fearing Him is not daring to *exclude* Him in the securing and satisfying of my life. The point here is fearing God and joyfully hoping in God are not opposites. We're still in a series on hope. And the Psalmist says we *fear* Him in that we dare not *hope* in anything *but* Him.

One would think it would be easy to hope in God. It should be a *no-brainer*. But it *isn't* easy because we are constantly bombarded with *options* for depositing our hope. That's what temptation is - *all* temptation. A Biblical definition of temptation is simply being offered *some other object of hope than that which God offers in His promise*. Since the garden of Eden Satan works to throw us back onto *ourselves* as objects of our hope for our own security and joyful satisfaction. And you can see this same list of false hopes repeated over and over in the Scriptures:

Jeremiah 9:23-24 - "Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

Last week we started looking at the tightly knit bond between *false hopes* and *sinful hearts*. People are dominated by sin when they believe the *promise* sin holds forth. So sin always *begins* with some sort of false hope. We *believe* something about the possibility some false hope holds out for our future. Every temptation to sin comes with the false promise that it will *work* for us in some way. Sin always addresses our *hopes* in some way. It will bring *satisfaction* or it will bring *security* or it will bring *joy*.

And as we say last Sunday, this is also why it is almost impossible to draw a sharp distinction between *hope* and *faith*. Sin always offers satisfaction in some area of life. Every sin begins with a false hope. And *faith* - at least *Biblical* faith - is always cherishing the promise of God more than the offer of sin. That's how *hope* is related to both *faith* and *sin*, depending on the *object* in which we hope.

When we, as the Psalmist described, place our *hope* in the Lord, faith tastes the goodness of God's grace and provision for our future *in advance*. Because we hope in the Lord we pursue satisfaction in His promise. And in faith we say, "Your loving kindness is *better* than life - better than anything I can deliver on my own terms. Jesus, you alone are the bread of life! You alone are living water! You take away the thirst for any of sin's promises!"

So hope is faith delighting in God's promise for my future. And this is the one thing that *disarms* the power of sin's false promise. And - stay with me here - this is *exactly* what John means when he says "**....And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith**" (1 John 5:4b). Once the power of false hope is dashed temptation loses its hook on our hearts.

But while there is *victory*, it is not a victory without a fight. And the fight between true hope and false began the moment creation burst on the scene. The very first thing the Devil attacked in the garden was **Eve's hope in God - her faith in the future goodness of God.**

The serpent's lie never varies. He's *crafty*, yes, but he's not *complicated*. The approach is *always* the same and it is *always* directed at your *hopes*. Where will you look for *security* and where will you look for *satisfaction*? That's the same ploy, repeated trillions of times since the Fall - "God's trying to cheat you. I am offering you *more* than God is going to give you. You will be better off on my terms [or, usually, *your own* terms] than on God's terms!"

Now, most of you haven't had a conversation with a snake today on the way to church. But the same battle rages in every person's mind. Satan's **tool** is the material stuff of this world. He calls out to our **pride**. And the way he makes his appeal is he constantly tries to offer you something more **attractive** than God's promise - something more **sustaining** and more **satisfying** than God's will.

What we're going to be looking at for the next few weeks are the specific **tools of Satan's craft**. We want to learn how he erodes our hope in God and thereby how he destroys our faith - our one tool for victory in this life. The Devil goes to church every Sunday. He rides the Go Train. He's in your car pool. He gets right into the middle of every argument you have with your spouse. He attends committee meetings. He works in your classroom. He works every minute of your life to keep you from **hoping in God**. That is his **only** goal. And it's the only goal he needs. This then dissolves the possibility of faith. And remember, faith is the victory [and it's the **only** victory] that overcomes the world.

So today we will begin examining the tool kit the Devil uses to keep us from hoping in God. And the first tool of choice is always the same - **pride**.

Pride is the chief species of unbelief. Pride is **anti-faith**. Pride in self is the opposite of trust in God. This is what becomes very clear as you study the Scriptures. Pride isn't usually painted in the colors we expect. It isn't usually shaking my defiant fist in God's face. And it isn't walking around looking into a mirror. Pride manifests itself by what I **refuse** to trust God to provide.

Our opening text from Jeremiah actually **lists** God's competitors in a proud heart: **Jeremiah 9:23** - "Thus says the Lord: **'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches....'**"

Notice those words carefully. You might think they're about a sinful reliance on **wisdom, might** and **riches**. And they **are** - sort of. But it's the verb in **front** of those words that should get our attention first. It's that word "**boast**" that should catch our eye. These are verses about **pride** before they're about anything else. These are the options chosen by the **proud** person in place of God's promise. This is the thinking of the **self-reliant**.

It's not that these things are wicked in themselves. God gives all good created gifts to us. The problem is in the dysfunctional nature of our hearts. Because of our pride in self we create **competitors** against hope in God alone for our two desired ends - **security** and **satisfaction**. Wisdom, might and riches are the **means** of the proud to **accomplish** what God alone promises to **provide**. Human wisdom, human might, and human riches - each one of these tempts us to take satisfaction in ourselves - our wisdom, our might and our riches. Our Jeremiah text pinpoints where pride manifests itself:

- 1) **Pride in our own wisdom** - "Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom...."(Jeremiah 9:23a).

We need to be careful here. The problem isn't in **being** wise. The Bible both **recommends** and **commands** wisdom in all of life. But Biblical wisdom is always defined as being the **opposite** of **self-reliance**: **Proverbs 9:10** - "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.**"

So Biblical **wisdom** is described in exactly the same terms as our opening text described Biblical **hope**: **Psalm 33:18** - "**Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love...."** And that similarity isn't accidental. Biblical wisdom, just like Biblical hope, **fears the Lord** in the sense that it only calculates on the basis of **God's promise and character**. Genuine wisdom never functions apart from God's promise for our **security** and our **satisfaction**.

In other words, we take **pride** in our wisdom - **boast** in our wisdom - to the extent that we trust our rationalizations and plans **over** the revelation of God's Word. This is the **perversion** of wisdom. We take pride in our wisdom when we plan our means for securing our own future on our terms rather than God's. We take pride in our wisdom when we plan our own strategies for victory in our circumstances because God is taking too long, or strategise for our own revenge rather than allowing for the sovereignty of God to work out all things for our good.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**"

Underscore those simple little words - "**Do not lean not on your own understanding.**" That is the breeding ground for sin. You will almost always **have** your own understanding - your own view and perspective. You can't help that. But when your understanding of a situation is in conflict with God's Word and His Spirit, don't **use** yours.

Don't *lean* on it.

Here's how we can start doing this. Allow the Holy Spirit space between your *initial impulses* and your *actions*. The Spirit of God tries to break into our reflex reactions like riot police, "Listen, your first impressions are wrong. Don't go by your fallen heart. Don't be swayed by greed or anger or love of attention or love of revenge. Instead, ***trust in the Lord with all your heart!***"

Notice those words, "***Trust in the Lord!***" We're talking about the power of hope to create a holy person here. That's what's at stake. Trust *what?* Trust that while your way came to your mind first, and while your way seems to offer such gratifying results, or perhaps while your way seems to be the only way you can even imagine ever will or could work, trust ***in the Lord***. Trust that God's way will accomplish more for you in the long run, though you can't get your head around that just yet.

2) ***Pride in our own might*** - "...let not the mighty man boast in his might"(Jeremiah 9:23b).

We take ***pride in our own might*** when we treat whatever power God has given to us as though it were a tool at our disposal to accomplish our own ends. The Devil wants us to view our own might in this way because he knows when we think of our power independently of our Creator we will always ***abuse*** it and it will always lead to sin. You can see this warning over and over in the Scriptures:

Deuteronomy 8:11-17 - "Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, [12] lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, [13] and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, [14] then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, ***who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, [15] who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, [16] who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know,*** that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. [17] **Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.'**"

We're all meant to see there's a world of difference between saying "***Thank God for bringing me out of slavery in Egypt,***" and saying "***It was amazing the way I escaped from Egypt.***" And the difference isn't just ***politeness***. The difference is in the ***way I see my life tended and secured***. The difference is whether I build my life around ***hope in God*** or in the ***ingenuity and power of self***.

Hope in God creates a response of ***faith***. Self-reliance creates a deeper and deeper vulnerability to whatever ***bondage*** to future sin the Devil chooses to send my way.

And great Christians don't just ***know*** this. They ***remind*** themselves of this: **Psalm 33:16-18** - "The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. [17] The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. [18] Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, **on those who hope in his steadfast love....**"

All right. There's the first step. David ***is*** a king. And he talks to himself as a king. He reminds himself that the king isn't ***secured*** or ***satisfied*** [those are the two important words] by his own might. And here's the ***effect*** of reminding himself of this: Look at how David continues in **verses 20-21** - "Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. [21] For **our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.**"

And now we see the role of ***hope in the Lord*** and ***deliverance from future sin***. This is the theme of this teaching. And once you begin to live all of life with your soul "***waiting for the Lord***" you will make fewer and fewer mistakes.

3) ***Pride in our riches*** - "...let not the rich man boast in his riches...."(Jeremiah 9:23c).

There is no doubt about it. Riches feed pride. That's because money is our world's symbol of self-sufficiency. ***Why*** do people want riches? Because money gives us the freedom to do the things ***we*** want to do. Listen to that again. It give us the freedom to do the things ***we*** want to do. Underscore ***we***. Money makes us feel ***more in control, more autonomous, less restricted***. All of which, of course, is simply another way of saying we can live ***more unto ourselves***. Which means riches incline us all to live ***less unto God***.

Money-pride is not an ***instantaneous*** departure from God. It doesn't happen in a single moment. In fact, it rarely looks sinful as it happens. Look at these insightful words from the prophet Hosea: "***....but when they had grazed,***

they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore *they forgot me*”(Hosea 13:6). It’s like a **domino** effect. They grazed. They were filled. Their heart was lifted up [that’s the inclination toward self-reliance - like leaning on their **own** understanding]. And then they simply **forgot God**.

And remember the whole point of this realization. When we are satisfied with anything less than God, we are sucked in by the alluring false promises of sin. Remember what we said earlier. Temptation - **all** temptation - gets its power over our wills by offering us substitute objects for our hope - our hope for either **security** or **satisfaction**.

There are a thousand and one false objects for your hopes for security and satisfaction. Your only protection is to learn what the Psalmist meant when he urged us to **“delight yourself in the Lord.”**

This is the constant fight of faith. Delight in the Lord isn’t complete until it becomes **intrusive** in your patterns of thought and life. You and I never know this truth **finally**. It calls for constant and diligent **remembrance and re-application**.

Psalm 33:22 - “Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as [or *in proportion as*] **we hope in you.**” Remember, the **steadfast love of the Lord** doesn’t just float down on your life like dew from heaven. We **keep ourselves** in God’s love in **proportion** to the extent we **fasten our hope for our future satisfaction and security** on Him.