

O, THAT WE MIGHT BE A PEOPLE FILLED WITH THE DARING POWER OF BIBLICAL HOPE

Part twelve - Teaching #1274 - Sunday, May 24th, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

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HOW FAITH AND SIN ARE EACH GENERATED BY WHERE OUR HOPE IS PLACED (continued) - Impatience

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [17] For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Isaiah 64:4 - "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him."

Psalms 23:6 - "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Lamentations 3:25 - "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him."

We'll try to look at each of these texts briefly this morning. We've been taking this whole series, and especially these last four teachings, to say something deeply Biblical and radically empowering to a life of holiness, without which, says the writer of Hebrews, no one will see the Lord. And the central thought of our studies can be stated briefly, even if unfolding the impact of it all takes time: ***where you place your hope determines the growth of either faith or sin.***

That's it. Faith grows hand in hand with hope, because it's ***hope - future anticipating hope*** - that leans into God and says His loving kindness is better than life. That's not just the title of a chorus we used to sing. God's loving kindness - that is His ***coming*** kindness in my future - is better than the life I can ***see*** with my physical eyes or establish with my own hands. His future kindness - the kindness in which I presently ***hope*** - is better than the life I can ***create*** on my own in terms of ***satisfaction*** and ***security***.

Hope joins hands with faith in relishing and cherishing the truth that it is better for our ***satisfaction*** and our ***security*** - there's the ***future*** look - to please God than to please anyone else. Hope and faith join hands in banking on the truth that God's future grace is more rewarding than any promise that sin or compromise would offer. Choosing God's promise and God's way over any substitute in all my present circumstances is ***better than life on any other terms.***

Hope is ***faith for the future.*** So my hope is really ***where I bank my life in the present.*** Hope is investing my life ***in God.*** This is how hope generates faith, almost to the point of making the two indistinguishable. And because of this there is nothing Satan is more anxious to do than set our hopes anywhere else. He really doesn't care what - money, fame, power, pleasure - ***satisfaction and security*** are the umbrella labels. He wants us looking to anything but God to make our lives good.

We've looked at the tools of the devil to divert our hope away from God. He uses ***pride*** to turn us from God's sovereignty to our own lordship over ourselves. He uses ***anxiety*** to turn us from God's bounty and care to the limitations of our own resources. And today we're going to study the fight of hope against ***impatience:***

1) WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IMPATIENCE REALLY IS AND CONNECT IT WITH OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

We're inclined, wrongly, to reduce impatience to a personal matter - like our temperament. And in this we greatly wrong our souls and limit the freeing work repentance might do.

The truth is, impatience is a very distinct form of ***unbelief.*** It's not a neutral emotion. Impatience,

like pride and anxiety, is a very specific form of unbelief. Impatience is **unbelief in two directions**. Impatience is always caused by unbelief about the **goodness of God's care** or unbelief about the **wisdom of God's timing**. All impatience stems from one of those two forms of unbelief.

Think about it. Impatience springs up in our heart when our plan is interrupted or shattered by **circumstances for which we see no reason or explanation**. Or, impatience springs up in the heart when the **timing of God's intervention isn't meshing with our plans and desires - perhaps, even our prayers**.

Why am I laboring this point, when it seems so obvious? Because until impatience is **identified** - actually **diagnosed** the way a doctor exposes a tumor or deadly virus - we will never fully appreciate the devil's plan to use impatience as an **enemy of hope in God**. And we will never see why impatience is a **holiness** issue, not just a **temperament** issue.

So remember, the devil wants to use either the **place of our circumstances** or the **pace of God's intervention** to rob of us our hope and delight in the Lord.

2) LIKE PRIDE AND ANXIETY, IMPATIENCE SPAWNS A HOST OF OTHER SINS BY DIMINISHING MY VISION OF ULTIMATE ETERNAL REALITIES

Here is one of the places Paul addresses this in his own experience:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [17] For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

If the devil can frame my satisfaction and security with immediate, material things he accomplishes two of his aims at once:

a) **First, my hope becomes attached to tangible, visible objects rather than God and His promise for my future**. Understand, nothing changes in my **theology** when this happens. I will still **say** I love God more than anything else. Christians never deny this. But in actual **practice**, I will bleed more when I lose money or reputation than when I skip devotions. So my **creed** stays the same. It's the **object of my hope** and **satisfaction** that shifts. And very few Christians can diagnose this problem with the kind of internal honesty needed to expose it.

I say again, the devil works hard to root my satisfaction and my security in this world. This is all he cares about. He knows if he has my **hope**, he has **me**. And you can see this in our text. Paul's opening words are very telling: **2 Corinthians 4:16a** - "**So we do not lose heart.....**" And he doesn't lose **heart** because his hope is fixed in eternity rather than the visible things of this world.

But if his hope were shifted - if his **satisfaction** and his **security** were of this stuff of this material world - he **would** lose heart. And his **heart** isn't just his **emotions**. That's how we've come to use the word. But for Paul the heart was **himself**. He would lose **himself** to the degree that his hope was in anything but God.

I said the devil accomplished **two** things when he draws our hope and fastens it to this material world. Here's the second disaster:

b) Second, ***the power of sin will continue to dominate my life as long as there are expected benefits of convenience, pleasure or material gain.*** That's because we are all designed by God in such a way that we will do anything to protect our own ***joy***. This is not a bad thing. It's not a sin to live for our joy. The sin comes when we sell ourselves short. We can only protect ourselves as we understand that our greatest joy is God Himself.

Another way of saying this is we protect ourselves as we ***hope in God***. As long as our greatest joy is God Himself we will ***hope*** in God. Our sin is not that we pursue joy. Our sin is that we believe the Devil's lies and settle for less joy than God intends.

This is profoundly related to holiness, though many Christians don't think it all the way through. We open our lives up to sinful distractions and reductions when we pursue ***secondary*** joys as ***primary joys***. The person who has understanding to see that his greatest source of joy is found in ***God*** will not allow anything to usurp God's place in his life.

I know all of this can seem hard to digest. But you can see it working itself out in Paul's experience in our text. As Paul writes his words he is having a rough go of it. He is doing his best to win the lost and the lost hate him for it. He is doing his best to lead this church, and the church is against almost everything he does. Add to this the fact that he's not getting younger and his body is experiencing nothing but pain and weakness.

Now, if Paul's joy were rooted in his success, or his health, or even his ministry, he would be in big trouble because none of those things was doing terribly well. But here's the secret of Paul's patience and endurance:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. [17] For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Paul is saying, "I'm so certain of the eternal - and what God is doing, even in my trials, to prepare me for the eternal - that I'm not swayed by what happens to me in the temporal. I am so delighted by what I have in God, I am not robbed by anything that I lose in this temporal realm. Those aren't the things that ***secure*** me and those aren't the things that ***satisfy*** me."

3) **HOPE FIGHTS IMPATIENCE BY LEARNING TO ALWAYS GIVE GOD THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT IN TIMES OF CONFUSION**

Have you ever heard the legend of Moses by the well? It's not an infallible Biblical revelation but it is a cute story:

"A legend says that Moses once sat near a well in meditation. A wayfarer stopped to drink from the well and when he did so, his purse fell from his belt into the sand. The man departed. Shortly afterwards another man passed near the well, saw the purse and picked it up. Later a third man stopped to quench his thirst and went to sleep in the shadow of the well."

"Meanwhile, the first man had discovered that his purse was missing and, assuming that he must have lost it at the well, returned, awoke the sleeper (who, of course, knew nothing of the whole incident) and demanded his money back. An argument followed, and irate, the first man slew the latter. Whereupon, Moses said to God, "You see why it is that men do not believe in you. There is too much evil and injustice in the world. Why should the first man have lost his purse and then become a murderer? Why should the second have gotten a purse full of gold without having worked for it? The third was completely

innocent. Why was he slain?"

"God answered, "For once and only once I will give you an explanation. I will not do it every time. The first man was a thief's son. The purse contained money stolen by his father from the father of the second man, who finding the purse only found what was due him. The third was a murderer whose crime had never been exposed and who received from the first the punishment he deserved. Now, in the future believe that there is sense and righteousness in what transpires even when you do not understand."

While that *story* isn't Biblical, its *message* is:

Romans 8:28 - "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Isaiah 64:4 - "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him."

I wish I had more time to show you how God does this over and over in the Scriptures. Here's one account. Toward the end of a prolonged Jewish exile in Babylon, Jewish scholars are beginning to wonder how God would ever be able to fulfill His promises to Jeremiah that He would once again bring His people out of bondage into their own land.

God was about to amaze them with his solution: **Ezra 1:1-2** - "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: [2] "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."

Now, Cyrus was not a Godly man. He had no track record of serving God. He had no intention to serve God. ***But He was going to serve God!*** We now know that 42 thousand Jewish refugees return and start building their temple! Many of us know the amazing story of fulfilled prophecy in the account of Cyrus. It gets told over and over. But the story doesn't end there.

The road to glory is rarely a straight line. Their enemies back in Judah oppose them and discourage their efforts: **Ezra 4:4-5** - "Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build [5] and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."

Imagine the discouragement. God had miraculously opened a door and now they sat and watched their enemies close it in their faces!

But there's more to this amazing story. In **Ezra 5:1** God sends two prophets - you probably only know them because they have books of the Bible named after them - ***Haggai*** and ***Zechariah*** - to encourage and uplift the people.

But the enemies go even further. They actually write a letter to the new emperor ***Darius***, begging him to put a stop to the work of these foolish Jews. Darius is not a Godly man either. He would normally have very little use for these Jews. But Darius begins to search the archives. He just happens to come across an old mandate from the days of Cyrus, authorizing the building of the temple.

Darius immediately sends out a letter with these words - **Ezra 6:7-8** - "Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. [8] Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from

Beyond the River.”

These stories are placed in the Bible to **teach us to hope in God**. Think about it. What's really going on here? Didn't God know about those enemies of the Jews when he caused Cyrus to send them back home in the first place? Didn't God know about all of the trials and opposition they would face? Didn't God know about the delays, the setbacks, and discouragement they would be up against when they got to work?

Yes. God knew all about that. Then why does He put them through all of that? The answer is stunning. It's because God not only wants the temple rebuilt. He wants His enemies to pay for it!

Now, between the time of Cyrus and the time of Darius, there were faithful workers who died laboring on those walls - never seeing their completion, and, just like in the legend of Moses, never knowing **why** God would allow so many delays and trials in the whole process. But **God** knew. And **we** know. And we are given precious promises to keep us patient. And to keep us hoping in God more than anything or anyone else.

There is incredible power for hope in one of the best known verses in the whole Bible. I sometimes think there is a divine plan behind the way almost everyone knows these words: **Psalm 23:6** - "**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**"

Do you believe that God follows you everywhere, everyday, to follow you up with his goodness and mercy? Do you believe that in everything He will cause you to conquer and work for your good? This is where our hope lies. And you won't place your hope there if you are **impatient**. Impatience is the **opposite** of hoping in God.

Don't set your hope on things temporal. Hope in God for **security** and **satisfaction**. That's what the Bible means when it says to "**delight yourself in the Lord.**" And let me close by giving you some homework. And isn't it great to have a pastor who is so kind that he gives you a verse to memorize that any four year old can digest: **Lamentations 3:25** - "**The LORD is good to those who wait for Him....**"

Check your heart. When you find yourself thinking about what you're really looking forward to - what you can't wait to have happen next week, next month, this coming year - what is your mind picturing? To the extent that the object being framed in your mind's desires **isn't** eternal and Godward, you're setting your soul up for a great fall. You'll become impatient with God and you'll lose the purifying power of Biblical hope. Then just pull that little memory verse out and play it over in your mind a few times. Remember, "**The LORD is good to those who wait for Him!**"