

Don't Lose Hope

But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.

Psalm 71:14

Hope is defined as a desire for something favorable and confidence in the possibility of its fulfillment, while despair is the absence of hope. There is a distinction between true and false hopes. Some people have blind hope with absolutely no substantiation for a positive outcome. But for the Christian, although God is unseen, there is more than enough evidence contained in the scriptures to give a believer substantial hope that our God will help in the most difficult of circumstances. In the scriptures, Israel's experiences during their journey to the Promised Land, Joshua's victory against Jericho, and David's triumph over Goliath are a few of the many bleak situations that resulted favorably for the people of God. Joseph could have succumbed to despair after being sold into bondage by his brothers, but he persevered with hope in his heart that ultimately the Lord would intend all things for his good.

In today's verse, it is apparent that the Psalmist is experiencing a time of great testing. He is asking to be delivered from the enemy and that the Lord would come and save him. Because of a wicked and cruel enemy, the Psalmist runs to the Lord, his rock and fortress. With God as his deliverer and protector, he proclaims that he will continually honor and praise the Lord more and more.

Though God is ultimately in control, we Christians exist in a broken world. Countless situations will arise in life that will require us to rest in hope. With faith in God, we have the true source of all hope. Some of the things we hope for will have a temporary quality to them. Exodus tells us while in hard bondage in the land of Egypt, the nation Israel hoped to be delivered from their servitude. After they were emancipated, they found new hardships lay before them. Later in the gospels, Bartimaeus' healing from blindness would not exempt him from being subject to other ailments during his lifetime. Even Lazarus who was raised from the dead would ultimately have to die. The one thing that Christians possess above all things is eternal hope. The crucified and resurrected Savior made that possible. In 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul states: if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. Our ultimate hope must lie beyond this temporary world. When our Lord was preparing the apostles for His departure, He assured them in his father's house were many mansions where He was going to prepare a place for them. The hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord surpasses all other hopes.

Remember that our Lord has said "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. He overcame the world by His death, burial, and resurrection. Because He lives, we can live also...eternally! So, when the trials of this life weigh us down, may we by the Grace of God and the strength of the Holy Spirit say: I will hope continually!

J. Ekis

Riches abounding

*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.
Ephesians 1:7*

There are a number of riches available to the children of God described in the Ephesian epistle. Not one of these descriptions is related to anything that can be attained or obtained from this world. In each instance, the riches are the Lord's. They are all made available by the Lord to His own by the *riches of His grace*, as initially explained in our text with respect to the gifts of redemption and forgiveness. As the apostle continues in this chapter to describe the rich abundance of numerous other benefits bestowed by the Lord on His redeemed, including wisdom and prudence, and hope in the purpose of His will, Paul later prays for even more for these believers, that God would give them understanding and knowledge of "the hope of his calling, and what [is] the *riches of the glory of his inheritance* in the saints" (v. 18). Even as he writes, he knows that the things he is attempting to describe concerning the riches of the glory of the saints' inheritance must be fully apprehended with the help of the Spirit of the Lord.

In the second chapter, he describes how God, being "*rich in mercy*," loved us with a love so great that it would elevate us from being dead in sin unto a heavenly place forever with Christ, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding *riches of his grace* in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (2:4-7). This seems to indicate that there will be even more to comprehend of the riches of His grace throughout those eternal ages. This is supported by his description of the responsibility and grace given to him to preach "the unsearchable *riches of Christ*" among the Gentiles (3:8). All of this abundant truth finally leads him again to declare his prayer for them, "That he would grant you, according to the *riches of his glory*, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (3:16), that they would be able to comprehend and "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

May we likewise submit ourselves as children of God to be willing recipients of the answer to the apostle's prayer, and seek to comprehend such riches, that we might reflect His manifold wisdom and riches, so that "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (3:21).

Friendship

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place..... – Job 2:11

It is difficult if not impossible to journey through life without friends. Making friends is easy for some and an arduous labor for others. There are a multitude of variables that impact the genesis and the sustainability of relationships when sons and daughters of Adam engage in this phenomenon we call “friendship”. But what is a friend? We learn from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar both what they are and what they should never be...

These three friends of Job started off well. In Job chapter two, they heard of the calamity that had befallen Job – his catastrophic loss of wealth, family, and health. They could have merely sent regrets. They could have “prayed for him”. But true friendship knows there is more to do. So they came “every one from his own place.” In fact, the text tells us they conferred and made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and comfort him (Job 2:11). They purposed to both empathize with him and to try to help him as best they could. This is the action of true friendship – considering the other before self. They left the comfort of their environs and travelled to see their friend. Once they arrived, they continued to do what true friends ought to do. The moment they saw him, they could physically see the damage that Job's fortune had wrought upon him, and it moved them to tears (Job 2:12). They wept with their friend. Sometimes, that's all a true friend can do. Many times, it's all one need do. They seemed to at least initially understand this. They sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. This was not an ostentatious show of good will, but a genuine effort to help a man in his grief. They stayed by his side and dared not speak a word. And had they continued in this state, it would have proven them the best of companions. The problem is, they did not...

After Job cursed his day and began his bitter questioning of his circumstance, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar made the mistake so many do in being friends. They stopped being wingmen and began offering unsolicited counsel. Had Job asked their opinion or input, perhaps some of their insight would have been helpful. But he did not, and in advising Job based on their limited knowledge of both God and Job's relationship with Him, their counsel became accusation. Thus, they actually unwittingly transformed from instruments of the Most High into tools of devil in his relentless assault on this man of God. So much so that God actually rebukes them sternly at the end of the ordeal and warns them to solicit intercessions from their friend Job for their folly.

Dear reader, are you a good friend to someone, or even to many? It is vitally important in our friendships to reflect the nature of our best Friend, the Lord Jesus. He did not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax. If anyone could have judged us righteously, it was Christ. But instead of judging us, He came where we were, wept with us, bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, and loved us to the end. He spoke the truth to us, yes – but in love, not in condemnation. And this, that we might rise with Him in newness of life. Let us resolve to be Christlike friends, to help and not hinder those upon whom the devil has unleashed his accusatory fury. The Spirit has yet to reveal what will be the reward of such friends.

-- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Divine Irony

Luke 1:52: He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

How often is the case that the Lord, in His superior wisdom, bypasses the rich and famous and bestows His benefactions on the least of humanity? In this case, the young virgin of Nazareth puts forth this canticle of praise for the marvelously "great things" her God had done. He could have chosen any one of many courtiers found at the Herodian palaces, but intentionally ignores status to exalt penury. Centuries earlier Isaiah predicted the upheaval of the status quo when he penned these words: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low."

Profane history affords us a plethora of examples of the adage coined by Baron Acton "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men". This has never escaped the eye of the Almighty who promises to rectify the matter when His kingdom shall appear and the promised egalitarian government of the King of Kings is installed forever and ever.

For that moment Mary revels in the anticipation of an immediate remedy to the unjust oppression her people had endured for centuries. As we know her hope would be deferred. The mighty do not succumb without a struggle. The "kings of the earth" and the rulers of Israel took "counsel together against the Lord" and slew the "Prince of life" and in so doing postponed the exaltation that Mary had prophesied.

As it would be, the Lord had others of low degree that he intended to incorporate in that exaltation. Heaven and earth shall pass away but the hope of His word shall come to its fulfillment. His Holy Spirit is even now assembling those of low degree out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessings to all who read,

Pastor

A Spiritual Callous

He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Proverbs 29:1

Today's text speaks of someone who "hardeneth his neck" to repeated reproof. Today, we might think of it as a callus. A *callus* is used to refer to hardened skin resulting from pressure and excessive friction and is usually acquired while doing a considerable amount of physical labor. This kind of callus can be protective if you continue with physical labor. This gives us some insight into the adjective callous which shares the same Latin root. However, the word *callous* means to be "insensitive to the feelings of others". This kind of callousness should be avoided at all costs because it refers to the callousness of our hearts.

The verse from Proverbs seems to mingle the physical picture with a perception of the person's heart and the results when one does not respond to God's reproofs. By ignoring the Spirit's admonition concerning sin, a person will continue down the wrong path dulling their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's voice. The plagues God sent to break down the resistance of Pharaoh and accomplish the release of the Hebrew captives from Egypt offer a glaring case of a hardened heart. In the account, it is stated that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. How did God do that? Did He decree that Pharaoh's was to be hardened against his own will? Of course not. God's intent was for each of the plagues to open Pharaoh's eyes to the power of Jehovah and the impotence of Egypt's false deities. But the blinded monarch dug in his heels refusing to be moved by the plagues, thereby hardening his own heart. When Pharaoh would not budge after the plague of locusts, his counselors came to him saying "*Knowest thou not that Egypt is destroyed.*" Even after allowing the Hebrews to leave, he changed his mind and ordered his army to reclaim the captives. Pharaoh's hardened heart led to the destruction of his army at the Red Sea.

Judas Iscariot is another example of someone who hardened his heart to his own destruction. Whether his ill and sinful motives were there from the beginning or developed through his years of following the Savior, his heart certainly hardened. Judas must have felt conviction while hearing the teachings and witnessing the miracles of Jesus. Our Savior's ministry on earth was validated and Peter clearly stated who Jesus was by proclaiming "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Not responding to the amazing events of Jesus' life, Judas denies and betrays the Messiah. On the other hand, Peter was so distraught when the Lord Jesus confronted him about his denial that he went and wept bitterly. His life drastically rebounds after the Lord's resurrection and he eventually becomes a martyr in the name of the One he previously denied.

As God's children, we want to be sensitive to the Spirit's moving. Even after conversion, our stubborn nature tenaciously holds on to our pride and does not always quickly respond to conviction. God in His lovingkindness continues to speak to us about our displeasing ways. We can guard against having our hearts hardened by beginning each day in the Lord's presence. We may not respond as extremely as Pharaoh did, but by refusing to yield to the Lord's leading we will miss out on many blessings the Lord intends for us. Keep your heart soft today by reading God's word and heeding the Spirit's voice.

J. Ekis

Draw Nigh

*Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.
James 4:8*

What a promise we have in this simple statement from James. He will draw nigh to you. God will! Though preceded by a four-word condition, the resulting benefit of having close relationship with the Creator of the universe should make the condition a welcome invitation. As Jacob served his seven years with such great anticipation for the immediate desire of his heart, so that those years seemed but a few days, how much more should our desire for the presence of God in our lives make this condition fall into similar perspective? This desire aligns us with the aspirations of the psalmists:

“When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.” (Ps. 27:8)

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” (Ps. 42:1)

“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” (Ps. 63:1)

“My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” (Ps. 84:2)

And yet, how much do we pursue this exhortation to draw nigh to God? What is it that keeps us from doing so? As we behold by faith the glory of the Lord through the “glass” of His word, can we be overwhelmed by the sight of His majesty, as much as Jacob was overwhelmed by the sight of his bride, so that the distractions of this life cannot detain us from our pursuit of Him? We can’t if we don’t focus on this promise. Yet, we need His presence every passing hour. So, whatever our hindrance, let us lay aside those weights and sins that so easily beset us, and draw nigh to Him who has promised to reciprocate.

Generation to Generation

One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. – Psalm 145:4

When studying my Bible through devotionals or commentaries, I like to consult the old authors above all others. There are numerous reasons for this. Unlike contemporary commentators, they have gone on to glory, so their legacy is solidified. If there was something hypocritical or pretentious about their walk with the Lord, it would be known by now, and they wouldn't be worth a reading. Additionally, the older preachers had little to nothing to gain monetarily from their writings. This is vastly different from today's environment where book writing and selling is an industry, and even internet blogging can be monetized, which has potential ill-bearing upon motive. But all those things aside, the voices of believers from past generations are immensely edifying primarily because they attest to the fact that the God of the Bible is the same today as He was during their respective eras. Be it from the period of the Reformation, the time of the Puritans and the Great Awakening, or the post-Civil-war-to-early 1900's, the pages penned by zealous saints from those times declare plainly that they were worshipping the same Christ of the apostles, and the same Jesus who walks with believers in our time. Thus, their exhortations fulfill our text – their generation praising His works and declaring His mighty acts to ours today.

One cannot read the scriptures without recognizing the unbroken line of succession God intends His truth to traverse. The God of Noah was the same God of Noah's great grandfather, Enoch, who walked with Him. The God of Abraham became the God of Isaac as well as the God of Jacob, and then Joseph. David declared God's goodness to Solomon, who received it and walked in Jehovah's way at least for a season, and then seems to have ultimately returned to it at his life's end. And as the baton of faith wobbled throughout the years in the house of David, God never seemed to be missing a man whom He could entrust with His truth. So much so that, despite the profound impact of the Lord's judgement upon Judah and the nation's Babylonian captivity, the promise of God found its way through the years of exile into the hearts of some of David's far-distant kin, Joseph and Mary, in the little village of Nazareth. Then, upon the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, the Apostles passed the unchanging truth of God's redemptive narrative to the next generation. And onward marched the faith from there all the way down to us...

It is remarkable to realize that the God we worship in spirit and in truth today is the very same God known unto our spiritual ancestors. From then to now, He remains unchanged. With an untoward generation surrounding us, let us resolve to live boldly and unashamedly proclaim His mighty acts, so that they can find the same Christ, the same redemption, and the same life-transforming God that we know to be faithful and true. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

Spiritual Entropy

II Timothy 3:13: But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

The universal laws of physics have proven that all created matter inexorably moves from order to disorder- from cosmos to chaos. One need not look further than the human body to validate that assertion. Since the sin of Adam, the creation, and all things therein, have been afflicted with the disintegration of the curse. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

But the law of entropy is not exclusively confined to the physical world. There is also a "spiritual" entropy that has been, active since the fall of man. Even the most ardent advocates of positive thinking must be forced to admit that morality is in a death spiral and rapidly migrating toward an inevitable dissolution.

Atheism espouses that there are no absolute truths. After Nietzsche declared "God remains dead. And we have killed him." he felt that he had liberated man from the Christian's fabricated system of right and wrong. Man could follow his lusts and passions with no moral restraints to disturb the mind with an artificially created guilt. Modern infidels have begun to move back from that position and are now positing a more amenable approach to goodness. Greg Epstein's best-selling "Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe" or the recent billboard campaign that asks the question "Why believe in God? Be good for goodness' sake". It seems that even the atheists are a bit concerned at the prospects of a brave new world with no moral constraints. Their problem is how to get the genie back into the bottle.

There was a time when the "prince of darkness" had to lurk in the shadows, furtively setting his engines of destruction for the unsuspecting dupes who fell for his bait. But now the devil swaggers on Main Street unabashedly boasting of the evanescent pleasures he offers in exchange for a life inveterate bondage.

Slick evangelical hucksters offer their audiences "Kingdom Now" "Prosperity Theology" which, despite what our eyes tell us, asserts that we are living in the kingdom now! Sound doctrine dismisses this fanciful notion. Spiritual entropy is accelerating to its ultimate end and the only remedy is the return of the Lord Jesus with His predicted Kingdom of Righteousness.

Jude 1:14-15: ... Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

-Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Provisional glory

*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
Philippians 4:19-20*

In the context before these verses, the apostle Paul is commending the Philippian church for their spirit of giving that they had evidenced throughout his ministry. He mentions their support for him during his mission work among and beyond them. Then he thanks them for the recent supply that they sent to him in his Roman jail, through their messenger Epaphroditus. He compares their gift to a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God, reminiscent of the Jewish sacrificial worship that he would have grown up with. He then adds this reminder that the heavenly Father is the one who would also supply their need, even as He has used them to supply his.

This sentiment reaches back to the model prayer that the Lord taught His disciples and the accompanying crowd in His Sermon on the Mount. Particularly among the petitions included in the prayer was the first request for personal needs: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). The petitions up to that point were focused on the holiness and glory of God, both in the honor of His name and in His kingdom, whether in heaven or earth. After it, the personal needs for forgiveness and deliverance from evil are further requested. Then the conclusion reminds the supplicant of the reason for all these requests: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever" (Matthew 6:13). Thus, we find sandwiched in the midst of what we might regard as more spiritual petitions the simple fact that we need the Father's gracious hand to provide our daily material needs. The apostle in our text acknowledges this connection, that in supplying our daily needs our heavenly Father's glory is just as much revealed. We also then ought to remember to praise Him for His kingdom, power, and glory in acknowledging His provision of our daily needs.

The Longsuffering of God

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. – 1 Peter 3:20

Longsuffering is an aspect of patience that connotes forbearance in response toward injury from another party. God is longsuffering. By what is He panged? Sin. It is a lesioning offense to His transcendent nature. He is of holier eyes than to look upon, much less suffer, evil. Yet He withholds immediate wrath upon His creation due to His desire to redeem every child of Adam, even to the point of showering man with blessings he does not deserve (Acts 17:25, 30). He “suffers long” with man’s ignorance or rebellion so that He might extend the priceless offer of His gracious redemption yet another day. He will not keep His anger forever. There is a day He has appointed in the which He will judge the world, as He did in the days of Noah (though this time on a much grander and irreversible scale). But the fact that we saw the sun rise this morning and draw breath into our lungs at this moment are attestations to the magnificent longsuffering of our God...

Longsuffering is something that both begets and is begotten of another marvelous attribute of our God – His kindness. How kind of God to deal so mercifully with humanity! When we consider our own pre-redeemed history, it is easy to appreciate the kindness and longsuffering of our Creator. Consider the filth in which He could have left us wallowing! But instead, after forbearing our self-destructive and sinful ways for what by all other measures could be considered far too long, He so kindly received our desperate cry for deliverance, raising us from the dust and the dunghill and setting us among the princes of His people. How grateful we can be that God was longsuffering with us!

But His longsuffering did not cease with our redemption. For each of us individually, He continues to display His kindness and longsuffering in dealing with our fleshly nature. He has exposed even more of Himself to human offense by sending His Spirit to dwell within us. How can it be that He puts Himself in such proximity to our corrupt and fleshly nature? But this He does so kindly for our benefit, that we might have the opportunity to walk in the Spirit and live a life that is unoffensive to His holy nature. When we stumble, He suffers long, and is kind. He reminds us we belong to Him. He urges us to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Oh, the goodness of our God!

And His longsuffering is outstretched still. Unredeemed mankind is corporately blaspheming His Spirit in these latter days. How much longer until He rises to shake terribly the earth is unknown to both men and angels. But while it is still called today, He is willing to save to the uttermost any who call upon His name. They are all around us, unwittingly enjoying the benefits of His patient nature. It is our privilege and responsibility as His children to see to it that His longsuffering is not a fruitless exercise. May He grant us opportunity to share the good news of His redemptive offer with someone before the sun sets. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Fragility of Life

And David swore moreover, and said, ... There is but a step between me and death. I Samuel 20:3

A furious, power-intoxicated King Saul had directed his energies and resources to assassinate his political rival. David's life was in jeopardy every day: I Samuel 18:11: "And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice." Though a young man, David had to live with the evident reality that life is ephemeral and our end is as unpredictable as it is unavoidable. Living with such an impending threat hanging over his head from day to day, drove him to an utter dependence on the protective hand of the Almighty. He would write: Psalms 31:15: "My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me." Thankfully, his prayer was heard and his life preserved.

In these troubled and perilous times, we have witnessed another assassination attempt on a president's life. Those who understand ballistic trajectory calculations have agreed that the bullet that grazed President Trump's ear was a millimeter away from entering his brain. Had he not turned his head at the precise moment the bullet arrived, it would have been a mortal wound. He was "but a step" from death!

The Secret Service budget for 2024 was \$2.4 billion, and yet a 20-year-old boy was able to evade scads of police and guards and find an unobstructed fire line to his target. Many have commented that the Lord had His protective hand on the president. All of this gives great comfort to those who acknowledge the overriding superintendence of our omniscient God.

Life is indeed very fragile. It is but a thin membrane that separates the physical realm from the spiritual. How often we must remind ourselves that we are drawn to an inexorable destiny with death? Let us heed the prophet Amos who warned us "Prepare to meet thy God".

Blessings

Pastor

Nevertheless

Luke 5:5

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

There will be many times when we must be able to give God the benefit of the doubt. This expression is defined as adopting a favorable opinion or judgment despite uncertainty. Situations may arise that lead our carnal intuition to take us in the opposite direction of what the Spirit of God and His word have commanded. Trusting an omniscient God should be easy, yet when fears, worries, and doubts assault us, we often resist the Lord's command.

After a fruitless night of fishing, Jesus tells Peter to launch out again into the deep and let down his nets. Peter expressed doubt by saying he had toiled all night and taken nothing. Knowing that Jesus had been a carpenter and Peter was a lifelong fisherman, he may have assumed to have more expertise in fishing than Jesus. Although he may have had some reservations, Peter gives Jesus the benefit of the doubt and lets down the nets. Peter's doubts were quickly erased when they drew in nets full of fish.

Others in the Bible also demonstrate a never-the-less attitude when commanded to do something seemingly unreasonable. In Acts 9 Ananias first offers an excuse before he relents and ministers to the newly converted Saul of Tarsus. 1 Kings 17, offers us the account of the widow of Zarephath, who in a time of famine was preparing one last meal from their meager food supply when the Prophet asked her to make him something to eat. Elijah promised that if she first fed him, the Lord would provide sustenance miraculously for her and her son. Even John the Baptist was hesitant when Jesus came to be baptized by him. John thought it should be the opposite way around. By complying with Jesus' request, John was blessed to witness the Father's approval from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (John 3:17).

The Scriptures tell us Shall not the Judge of all the earth doeth right? (Genesis 18:25), and He hath done all things well (Mark 7:37). Yet from our earthly perspective, these truths are often challenged during severe trials and testing. When we need an immediate answer from above, the Lord may say "Wait". In situations that appear impossible for any positive outcome, the Lord speaks, "Only believe". By God's grace and through the experiences He allows, we can learn to trust Him even when there seems to be no good conclusion. In those extreme times may we be able to say Nevertheless, I will let down the net.

J. Ekis

With Him

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

Revelation 17:14

The Lord of lords and King of kings by His very person and nature shall overcome all that might attempt to come against Him. But His glory is magnified also in that he does so not alone, but with them that are with Him. There is no better place to be than to be with Him. In His earthly ministry, Jesus chose twelve to be with Him (Mark 3:14). After his miraculous delivery, the maniac of Gadara requested of Jesus that he might be with Him (Mark 5:18). In the upper room, Jesus promised His disciples that He would come again to receive them to Himself so that they would be “where I am.” Shortly after that Jesus prayed to the Father that, as He would be restored to His glory with the Father, his disciples would also “be with me where I am.” Even in the epistles, Paul reminds the Colossians that they are buried with Him, risen with Him, and have been quickened (made alive) with Him through His forgiveness (Col. 2:12-13). He later tells them that, since He is our life, when He shall appear they shall also appear with Him in glory. And so we see in our text, as Jesus returns in that day to overcome His worldly enemies, who still dare to make war against Him, they that are with Him continue to enjoy the glory and victory of their Lord and King. All of this is based on His power to cleanse from all unrighteousness and declare them to be called, chosen, and faithful. These describe the position and privilege of those who were made by Him and for Him, and have become the recipients of His grace by faith.

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Secret Service

Daniel 6:22: My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me:

The US taxpayers forks out over \$3.4 billion dollars annually to protect the lives of the president and his family, both past and present, as well as other designated leaders. Despite the enormous price tag, a former president narrowly escaped death at the hands of a 20 year-old neophytic assassin, who inexplicably eluded the dozens of agents assigned to the protection of the President Trump. The failure of the Secret Service, in this recent debacle, was so egregious that even Republicans and Democrats voiced unanimous opinions that the director should immediately resign or face termination for her dereliction of duty.

Believers have secret service agents assigned to them who are given charge to protect and defend from assault any would-be malevolent actors. Traditionally known as “guardian angels”, these “ministering spirits” have been assigned by the Lord of Hosts. Thrust into the the Lion’s den, Daniel is saved from the rapacious jaws of the hungry beasts by the interposition of an angel from heaven. In rare instances, such as Daniel’s case, these angles take a material form and their prodigious powers over the agents of harm are evidenced by the protectees. But those occurrences are the exceptions. Mainly the angels prefer anonymity. When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife to give the glad tidings of the birth of a coming deliverer, Manoah could not help but require the name of the heavenly visitant to which the curt reply was given “Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?”. Indeed God’s protective service to us is quite invisible-a secret service!

Jesus, “who was “tempted in all points as we are” was faced with numerous attempts by the wicked one to destroy Him. He had a retinue of angels that assured that no harm would come to Him until His “hour had come”. The devil knew that his attempts were futile because “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee”. When the haughty Pontius Pilate sarcastically demanded of Christ why had His army not come to deliver him, Jesus simply answered “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”. Twice did Peter escape the dungeon and death by the advocacy of a guardian angel who opened the cell doors and led Peter to the street at which point he vanished.

Though angels, for now, never take material form, their protective assignment has not been abated. They have their assignment and seek no acclaim from their mortal charges. Perhaps in the coming kingdom a full disclosure will be manifested and we will see how many calamities these Secret Service agents have prevented. Hebrews 1:14: Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

Right Thinking

The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit. – Proverbs 12:5

Perhaps one of the most striking things that happens in the salvation experience is the transformation of the inner man that emanates from the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). Indeed, redemption is contingent upon repentance, which itself is a changing of the mind. The Spirit convicts and convinces the sinner of his guilt, driving him toward the cross of Christ. But God is not finished with our thinking after we receive His grace. In fact, He is only beginning the process of cleansing the chambers of our imagery. This process is met out both incrementally and progressively throughout the remainder of the days of our earthly pilgrimage.

As believers, because we were made righteous by the blood of Calvary, we can think rightly. This has massive implications to practical living. We now possess the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). This means that we own the peculiar ability to “judge [i.e., understand] all things” (1 Cor. 2:15). We need not be surprised or puzzled by the world’s rush to evil. We understand that principalities and powers are vying for control, and that the devil knows that he has but a short time. We understand the pull of the flesh on our fellow man because the Spirit Himself is battling our own sinful nature on a daily basis. We see beyond the fashion of this world because we know that it is passing away. These are all things the unsaved mind is incapable of processing, and why worldings get things wrong over and over again.

But right thinking does not stop with accurately assessing our natural and spiritual environs. It goes well beyond that. As righteous children of God, we are now empowered to gird up the loins of our minds (1 Pet. 1:13) to battle the world, the flesh, and the devil’s influence upon us. We protect the sanctum of our mind and harness spiritual sobriety therein with the helmet of the hope of salvation (Eph. 6:17; 1 Thess. 5:8). This nexus between the temporal and eternal where we once fostered and entertained all manner of proud and evil imaginations has been declared the property of the King of Heaven. While impossible prior to His reclamation, it is now our grand privilege and responsibility to both adopt and continuously cultivate therein things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Php. 4:8).

Christian, are you not grateful that the Lord has redeemed your mind? Are you practicing good thought-keeping? The Spirit of our God has enabled each of us who belong to Him to think rightly. Let us, with the psalmist, invite Him to try us and know our thoughts, to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:23-24). -- D. Murcek

Lord, Help Me to Be...

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

1 Corinthians 10:6

The Bible, the inspired word of God, has many ways to instruct us. There are commandments, precepts, and principles to reveal the will of the Lord. Biographical sketches of both good and evil people give us insight into how to live or what to avoid. Historical accounts record events and teach spiritual lessons that are applicable to our lives. There is prophetic content to inform us of things to come, while the recorded words of Jesus inspire us to draw close to Him. Today's verse recounts the consequences of unwise and disobedient choices made by God's people. With that in mind, let us focus on better examples in God's word.

A profitable spiritual exercise is to observe what God says about some individuals and ask ourselves: Am I like this? or can I become like this? If we do not have these qualities we can pray and ask, *Lord, help me to be more like these saints*. Here are good examples to which we can aspire.

Genesis 15:6 *And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD: and he counted it to him for righteousness.* Do we truly believe in Him at all times? If not, ask for His help to do so.

Numbers 12:3 *Now the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth.* Do we often let pride and arrogance impede God's work in us? If so, we might ask for a meek spirit.

Judges 6:12 *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.* We can ask the Lord to be with us in every situation so that we might display boldness and confidence in His service.

1 Samuel 3:4 *The LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.* Do we quickly respond to volunteer when the Lord calls us?

2 Samuel 6:14 *And David danced before the LORD with all his might...* Is our service and worship filled with this much energy? If not, may the Lord give us a greater vision of Him.

1 Kings 17:5 *So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD...* Pray the Lord helps us to respond as quickly as Elijah did when the Word of the Lord commands us.

Job 1:1 *... and that man (Job) was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.* Lord, help us to balance our love and fear for you. Teach us to hate evil, especially the evil within our own hearts.

Daniel 1:8 *But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat...* How hard do we try to keep ourselves from the defilements of this world? May we seek to have greater purpose in our hearts.

These are just a few examples that can inspire us to do better for our Lord. This is not a self-improvement plan that can be done with our own strength and willpower. Any gain in spiritual strength is because of what the Holy Spirit provides. May we pray: *Lord, help me to be more...*

J. Ekis

Heavenly hope

For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.

Colossians 1:5-6

The hope of the Christian is a sure thing to which we look forward, and though it remains in the future, it is a present reality. In this passage, the apostle Paul is describing his thanksgiving in his prayers for the Colossian believers, as he has heard of their hope that is bringing forth spiritual fruit in their lives. He describes that hope as laid up for them in heaven. The basis for their hope is the truth that they have heard through the gospel message of God's grace, which they had received. Yet the complete realization of the Christian hope is laid up in heaven. As Paul described to the Corinthians, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9). However, in the very next verse, he tells them "but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." This he also explains to the Ephesians when he describes their spiritual sealing by "that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

So, although the final hope for which we wait remains in heaven, where Jesus said He would go to prepare a place for us, and then come again and receive us to Himself in that place (John 14:3), the understanding and knowledge of that promised state resides within us by the Holy Spirit who has sealed us. His working within and then out of us is energized by the same hope. As we then yield to Him, His fruit is manifested in our lives, to bring glory to Him as we bring the same hope of the heavenly gospel message to others here, while we wait to see Him. May our heavenly hope always be a present reality as we represent our Lord and Savior.