

Think on These Things

A path called Hope

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*“But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion”* (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

The economy has faltered. The stock markets have crashed. By some estimates, more than \$6 trillion of wealth has been lost in the equity markets. Companies continue shedding workers like trees shed leaves in the fall. Atheists think Christians are stupid. Terrorists (and now, pirates) just want us dead. It's sort of a bleak picture.

Yet, in Psalm 55:22, David could declare, “Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you.” 1 Peter 5:7 reiterates, “Cast all care on Him because He cares for you.” Philippians 4:6-7 reads, “Be anxious for nothing but in everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Easier said than done, right? Oftentimes, when times get tough, tight, or tenuous, we forget to follow through. But the passage really sums up the attitude of peaceful contentment (not complacency) a Christian can enjoy. The difference between contentment and complacency is that complacency means, “Why bother?” while contentment means, “Why worry?” It's not that Christians are in any way exempt from trials or cares; it's that the avenue on which we can address our struggles is a path named Hope.

What does it mean when we say, “He has lost heart”? It means one has lost hope; he is sick at heart and life has become empty and pointless. In Acts 27:20, during Paul's voyage to Rome, a storm arose at sea and the crew saw no sun or stars for days. As a result, “all hope was given up.” Nevertheless, in verse 22 Paul encouraged the crew to “take heart.” He told them that hope remained.

Hope is the prescription for a sick, sad, disappointed heart (Proverbs 13:12). True hope comes from the Scriptures. Romans 15:4 reads, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have

hope.” On this verse JB Philips commented, “For all those words which were written long ago are meant to teach us today; that when we read in the Scriptures of the endurance of men and of all the help that God gave them in those days, we may be encouraged to go on hoping in our own time.”

This hope is more than just wishful thinking. It is a Romans 8:24-25 brand of hope: “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

It is the kind of hope that breeds faith that leads to action. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith and hope are closely related. What one hopes for (earnestly expects), for which faith is the substance (faith puts flesh on the skeleton – makes it real), provides the spark for action. We see that by faith, “he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope” (1 Corinthians 9:10). And we learn from Galatians 6:9 that we must not “grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

In Romans 4:13-25, God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. Yet, how old was Abraham? According to Genesis 17:17, Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. Genesis 18:11 goes so far as to say that Sarah was past the age of childbearing. Yet, in Romans 4:17, Abraham believed in a God who “gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.” In verse 18, Abraham, “contrary to hope, in hope believed.” In verse 19 Abraham (not being weak in faith) did not even consider his own body (though already past the physical ability to produce a child). Thus, he did not waver at the promise through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith in God (verse 20), and, as such, in verse 21, he became fully convinced.

We do not serve a “just struggle to get by and hope for the best” kind of God. The Jehovah God we serve today is the same God who guided Abraham. We serve a God who can do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).

As such, Biblical hope causes Christians to be transforming and triumphant in the face of tragedy and trial. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 reads, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Christians can display an “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”

attitude (Philippians 4:13). We can [rejoice] in hope, [be] patient in tribulation, [and continue] steadfastly in prayer (Romans 12:12), knowing that we have hope beyond this life which serves as an anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19).

If you have lost hope or are on the verge of losing it, it is my prayer that you will think on these things.