

Hope

James 1:2-8

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* (James 1:2-8(ESV))

You might recall, that when I was last with you, we spoke about the “trials” and the “sufferings” that we encounter as we go through the days of this life. And those trials and sufferings truly are many, and they come in so many different forms . . . as the old servant Job lamented, “our days are few and full of troubles”.

And though such words be often true and often painful, I want us to begin today by reminding ourselves that those of us who have Christ, God’s chosen children, are never without “hope”, especially the blessed kind of “hope” that is a foundational part of the gift of “faith”. We’re told in Romans 5, that

⁵ hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5 (ESV))

“Hope”, as we all well know, is such a needful part of our daily existence, essential to the well-being of our souls . . . spiritually, emotionally, and even physically.

And “hope” is especially needful when our faith is “under fire” and being “tested”. As God speaks about here, “testing” that is not just “occasional”, but “testing” that is taking place, almost continually, in one form or another, all throughout our day.

With God, the “testing of our faith” is a regular exercise for our soul, so that we will always be in “fit shape” to do the work He calls us to do.

As I pondered through the words of this passage, I noted that God very pointedly led our thoughts to a special defect that can develop within our faith, one that we must deal with, else it can quickly get out of hand. And here He calls that defect, “doubt” and “double-mindedness”. And He gives us the visual description of our minds and hearts being “tossed about by the winds and waves of pressing circumstances”. Listen again! Verse 5,

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

There are so many things that can bring about “doubt” and “double-mindedness” within our thinking. And so many opportunities.

For some of us, “doubt” and “double-mindedness” is brought about by the constant beating of “political drums” on the television news. For others, it’s articles on Facebook.

I don’t have television news or Facebook, so for myself, it seems that most often the occasion comes when I have gotten “busy” with some project I’m involved in, perhaps just cutting the grass. As I get focused on the project, my mind seems free to wander. And before I realize it’s happening, my mind starts churning on problems taking place, perhaps with one of my beloved family members. And my mind “churns” on how I would “fix” them, if only they would let me. And mixed all into my thoughts are differing elements of anger, and frustration, and often, a broken heart.

And what that means is that, in my churning, I have left the Lord, and His guiding and comforting Hand completely out of the equation.

And if I let those kinds of thoughts continue for just a little while, a distance, a little gap, can develop in my relationship with God. It may be an ever-so-small gap, but that’s all the devil needs to find occasion to bring my “faith under fire”, and for “doubt” and

“double mindedness” to begin to creep in and take over. And “hope” becomes the first casualty of my “doubting”. A loss of “Hope”.

But then when my mind does remember to bring God back into the equation, sometimes it's with a question, “God I know you can help this situation, why won't you do it, just this once?”

But folks, those kinds of questions and doubts can be a “double-edged sword”, especially when I am asking God for some specific answer that I have contrived. Too often, I really do try to get my “own ideas” and “my own will” wedged into God's method of handling of matters.

Thankfully, eventually God is able to drag my mind back to reality and remind me that He really does have a plan for the handling of every situation, and that His plan has to take into consideration all the many “other” people and factors involved in the matter. And I'm reminded that His ways are so much, much better than my ways. But still, time after time, I find it ever so difficult to get myself over onto God's side of the equation.

A good example of what I'm speaking about would be as I pray fervently for the salvation of my children, and for my grandchildren, and now even my great-grandchildren. And also, as I pray for some of the problems in their marriages.

I know that God would have me to pray for such things. He doesn't desire that any should perish. Listen!

9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 (ESV))

I love this verse, but did you notice the words at the beginning of it? Let me read it again because this is where I can go astray with my doubting.

9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

These words describe exactly the “tossing of the waves” that can take place in my mind, if I am not careful. Because, I want my loved ones saved “now”. And I want their marriages fixed “now”. And if I am not careful, impatience can seep into my mind, counting God’s handling of those matters as “slowness”. I don’t want Him to take all the time He often takes. I want God to reach into my loved one’s lives and “make” them to turn and be saved or to “make” them to turn back and love their wife or husband.

And I find myself crying out to God, “Oh God please just knock them to the ground as you did the Apostle Paul! Make them turn to you.

And unfortunately for my soul, as these words warn, while I wait for God’s plan to unfold, impatience turns to “doubts” and “double-mindedness”, and I can begin to lose “hope”.

“Hope” seems always to be that part of my “faith” that suffers most. And the devil seems to know that “hope” is my weakest point. And he attacks it at every opportunity, bringing more “doubt” and more “double mindedness”.

And perhaps the same may be true for you, because “hope” can sometimes be such a tenuous and fragile thing, especially when our “faith comes under fire”.

May I go back and remind us again of the simple definition of faith that God gives to us, and also remind us of how “hope” is so much a part of what our faith is all about. Listen again to these simple words in Hebrews 11:1

faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.

“Hope” sits right at the center of God’s plan of “faith” for us. That is probably why “hope” is so often the focused point of satan’s attacks. As our “faith comes under fire” and our hope for a particular outcome begins to wane, our battle front begins to cave in with it. And that is when discouragement and the “doubt” and “double mindedness” spoken about here begins to set in upon us.

And folks, because this gift of “hope” is so vitally important to our faith, I’d like to spend our last few minutes today, examining the gift of “hope” in some deeper detail?

If you will, please turn with me in your scriptures, to 1 Peter 1:3. And follow along with me . . .

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

Note these words carefully folks, the words “caused”, and “born again”, and then also, “a living hope”.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Those words folks, are profound! They speak of a power beyond anything you and I possess. First, we see that it is God, and God alone, who brought salvation into our souls, and not our own random “free will” decision. He Himself “caused” us to be “born again”. Yes, we did, at some point in the transaction, agree with Him and we received Christ into our heart. But it was never we ourselves who thought up the idea of salvation and then brought it into being. It was and always is “God as the first-cause”, not you and not me, but God and God alone.

And in this transaction that God calls being “born again”, “changes” really do take place within our souls, real and actual changes, mysterious and very Spiritual changes. Every part of who we are, how we think, and especially how and what we believe about God, and how He interacts with us, “changes”.

Every part of us went from a “dead” form of existence into “life”. From dead into living. That’s hard to fathom, but we were really and actually “dead” in our trespasses and sins. And we were on that “broad path” that leads to eternal damnation, when He suddenly “quickened us”, brought us to life, causing us to be “born again, brand new, not just “rehabilitated”, but “new”, “brand new” creatures.

And in our new birth, we were “born again into a new and “living hope”.

What does that mean, a “living hope”? This “living hope” is what God told us about when He gave us the definition of “faith”. And it is a very different “hope” from what we, once thought it was. When we were still unsaved, “hope” had a whole different meaning to us.

But what is that difference, between, how in our unsaved condition, we used to hope, and the way we can now hope . . . now that we are saved?

Simply this! When we are born again into a “living hope”, that kind of new “and living hope” has a new source and a new foundation for its trust. Our “hope” is now in “God”, in who He is, and is His Sovereign Plan. And our new birth brings with it the firm belief that it is God and God alone who determines all the possible outcomes of our hopes. Hopes like I mentioned a moment ago, if my loved one will be saved, or if their marriage will be mended. My hope must be in God and God alone for the right outcome.

Now, yes, all the unsaved people of this world do also have “hope”, at least a form of hope, but again, it really is a different form of hope. I can still recall what that hope was like during my “dead” years, before I was saved. The problem with that kind of hope is that it has no real basis, no real source that can bring about those “things hoped for”.

That form of “hope” rests, not in a Person (God) who is “working all things together for our good”. But instead, the unbeliever’s hope rests in a belief that perhaps some “random events” might come together in some mystical random occurrence and bring about the thing they are hoping for.

Folks, do we not realize that that foolish kind of “hope” is being taught to our minds every day, through so many sources, especially our media, and even within our school systems.

I confess that I have often enjoyed watching those science programs, especially on PBS, that attempt to convince us about how life takes place on the earth each day.

But folks, do we not recognize that their theories and their teachings are in “direct opposition” to the truths given to us in these scriptures.

Their theories and their teachings describe a world existence that is solely the result of uncontrolled “random events” taking place simultaneously, all day, every day, and by their random occurrences, form patterns that determine the outcomes that we experience . . . asserting that a bunch of random, maverick molecules bouncing off one another, causes the world to somehow do all the wonderfully precise things that are taking place each day.

And do we not realize what such beliefs as those do to this matter of “hope”? Instead of believing that there is a Living and Loving Father who is at work, caring and providing and carrying forward everything that is taking place, hope and trust is instead given over to some belief in some bunch of random events taking place that will somehow come together and produce the thing that is hoped for.

How sad! How so very sad! And how so very foolish! A “hopeless hope”!

May I close with some encouraging words? They are this! God, our loving Father, has more for you and me, His beloved children, than the foolishness that the world has to offer. Our loving Father, is the “first cause” of all that takes place in our lives. And He has saved us into a “Living Hope”, a “Hope” that rests firmly within His divine omnipotent power and plan. And we need never wander in a sea of “doubt” and “double mindedness”, tossed about by its winds and waves. Our “faith” and our “hope” in Him is real and it is trustworthy in every circumstance of life.

And when we do allow ourselves to drift over into those dark and difficult wanderings of the mind, Jesus invites us back with the precious words . . .

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
(Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV))

Let’s pray!