

A FUTURE Filled with HOPE

Dear Friend,

At a time when so many are losing hope to the extent that they have no real future before them, it is critical that we learn to apply Proverbs 23:18 in our personal lives now: “There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.”

Dr. Charles R. Ringma has stated, “If we live in hope, we have a future. If hope dies, then the future dies with it. The person who is without hope can only live with the legacy of the past and the circumstances of the present.” So many are depressed at this moment because the pain of the past and the unmet expectations of the present have removed all real hope for the future. As a result, all they can think about is how are they going to escape the present situation they are in which appears hopeless with no real future. The problem in just leaving our present circumstances provides no real solution, for the key is learning how to live in hope.

The person who has learned to live in hope is the person who is living in the conscious presence of God. In the awareness of God’s eternal presence, we are awakened to His love. This love is demonstrated not only through the wonders of creation, but also through the reality proclaimed in the Scriptures that He has sent His son, the resurrected Christ, who plows daily through our hopeless circumstances, planting seeds of life both now and for all eternity.

Because Christ is risen, we have hope. A reality demonstrated through every seed that is planted and then resurrected into the wonderful plant with the purpose planned at the time of its creation. The Creator of all commands through His creation and the power of His word, “So do not fear; for I am you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is.41:10). The fact that God upholds us with His righteousness right hand tells us we do not need to be afraid of life. Present circumstances cannot suffocate our hope for a future, for the resurrected Christ has provided a hope for a future both now and for all eternity.

The question is how do you apply this in your personal life when you encounter hopelessness and depression? Many engage in fight or flight. Psalm 143 shows us a better way. The Psalmist David is desperate. He cries out, “O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief” (verse 1). Like David, perhaps you feel like declaring, “my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed” (verse 4).

Not only does David identify with our needs but he also shares some very practical steps to live victoriously when it seems that our world is falling apart. He says “O Lord, hear my prayer. The first step is to pray. Then David says, I remember the days of long ago” (verse 5). The second step for victoriously living, David says, is recalling the situations God brought us through in the past when everything seemed hopeless (Example, 1 Sam.30:1-20).

The third thing David would do was to mediate not only on the promise of God’s Word but also upon the wonders of His works. This includes not only His miraculous intervention in times of hopelessness but also the works and wonders of His creation. Beholding the wonders of

God's creation sparks a sense of awe within us as we taste, touch, smell, hear and see all that He has made. But the wonders of God's works go far beyond creation. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Think about it. God loves you so much that He gave us His only begotten Son who died on the cross for your sins and conquered death through His resurrection.

The fact is that even though we know that the death of Jesus Christ has provided the solution for sin and His resurrected body opened the door to an eternal future for us in the presence of God, we still live in a very troubled world. That troubled world also invades regularly our inner world, robbing us of the reality that we have a future filled with hope. Paul reawakens us to the future that hope provides in the midst of our present circumstances when he declared, "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us" (Romans 5:2-5).

If you have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life, then receive the hope and the future He has provided for you. This hope frees you to love and be loved. For without the free flow of such love you will find yourself growing old in a lifeless world without hope for a future. Don't you know that people grow old not because of the hardening of the arteries, but because of a hardening of the heart? Time and hopelessness wear us down as we travel through this vale of tears. Yet when we have hope burning within, we have a refuge, which keeps the hearts of love from hardening. "We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor.4: 16 NIV). The Message Bible expresses this verse in the following fashion: "We're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without His unfolding grace." It is this unfolding which cries out that we have a "Future filled with hope". It is in this knowledge that the Spirit moves and joy in the present troubles is reborn. Yes, the bills may be mounting, but the reality that, "my God will meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus," (Phil.4:19) provides a present peace and a hope for the future that passes all understanding. After all, wasn't it St. Frances of Assisi who said, "It is not fitting, when one is in God's service, to have a gloomy face or a chilling look"? Hebrews gives us the key for not only keeping a joyful look, but also retaining hope that has a future when it declares, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."(Heb.12:2, 3)

Chances are you are already growing weary and losing heart in your lot in life or in whatever you are doing if you don't have your eyes fixed on Jesus and the hope of heaven. In AD 250, a man named Cyprian had "his eyes fixed on Jesus" and possessed a hope that had a future. He wrote his friend Donatus:

"This is a cheerful world as I see it from my garden under the shadows of my vines. But if I were to ascend some high mountain and look out over the wide lands, you know very well what I should see: brigands on the highways, pirates on the sea, armies fighting, cities burning; in the amphitheaters men murdered to please applauding crowds; selfishness and cruelty and misery and despair under all roofs. It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad

world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy, which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians—and I am one of them.”

Cyprian had a joy resulting in a hope that had a future. He had overcome the world to the extent that he later died for his newfound joy and the hope it produced. Yet even death could not rob him of this hope, for death itself provided the reality of heaven and an eternity in the presence of the Living God.

We may have found that as we have stepped out of our sheltered gardens into the needs and hurts of others, pain and uncertainty. But your willingness to endure suffering because of your love for others and forfeiting your own comfort enables you to move closer to the heart of the divine. As we get older, we discover that joy is often wedded to sorrow, and peace is given in the midst of pain. Living the Christian life is a journey of faith, which takes us everywhere we always wanted to go, but never by the route we expect or choose. Yet as we trust God, we receive a hope that has a future, along with a powerful joy that cracks open the deepest sadness and disappointments of life because it is focused on Jesus who conquered death itself.

When Nehemiah told the people, “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh.8:10) he was actually saying the joy of the Lord is your wall. It is this wall, which surrounds our souls and enables us to endure the paradox of pain and declare in word and deed that we have the hope of heaven and the eternal future that it provides. “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what he (or she) already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Romans 8:24, 25). “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depths nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

To live in the hope that Christ provides is vital. This hope enables us to live fully in the now with the joy that God will be with us in whatever the future may bring. In the midst of their needs, the Biblical writers, who experienced this hope, were able to say “We have tasted of the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age” (Heb.6:5) and have already experienced “the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor.5:5). J. Moltmann points out that, “the one who is born again is, as it were, ahead of himself; he lives from the thing that is coming to him, not from what is already in him.”

We have hope because God has called us to be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ who strengthens us. In Ephesians 6:10-12 we are told, “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We are involved in a spiritual battle in which we are called to be victors not victims. In 1 Timothy 1:18, 19 we are told to “fight the good fight, holding on to the faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.” Fighting the good

fight is as the Lord told Zerubbabel in Zec. 4:6, “Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord Almighty.”

I have found in my daily battles that these words are so true. Satan will try to defeat me with depression, anxiety, and frustration and at times even hopelessness. How I must remember that victory and the hope it provides is not through my own might or power but by the Spirit of God. This is illustrated in Revelations 12:10, 11 where it says, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down. They overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.” We are victorious over Satan as a result of the death of Jesus Christ (the shedding of His blood) and the power of His resurrection. The word of our testimony is the personal application of this “blood of the lamb” to the “door post” of our hearts. This takes us back to the Passover in Exodus 12:13 where God told the children of Israel, “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”

John the Baptist, in reference to Jesus, declared in John 1:29, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Paul describes the effects of the bloodshed on the cross by the “Lamb of God” (Jesus) in Eph. 1:7, 8, Eph 2:13, and Col. 1:20. In Eph 1:7,8 we read, “In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.” When Satan tries to depress and defeat us with thoughts and feeling of guilt, by putting on our helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:17) and meditating on the fact that our sins have been forgiven because of the “blood of the Lamb” have hope. But there is more. As the evil one tries to make us feel alone, forsaken and hopeless we are able to defeat Satan by believing Eph. 2:13. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the Blood of Christ.” This provides us hope both now and for all eternity.

For the one who lives in the hope that Christ provides there is a future. This hope is more than optimism that believes things will improve. It is a hope centered in God. It acknowledges that He loves us and is drawing us through the circumstances of life into His will and purpose for our lives. This reality births within us a hope that knows it is not us but God who has the final word and “That in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”(Romans 8:28).

I would like to conclude with these words by Henri Nouwen:

“Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary were not filled with wishes. They were filled with hope. Hope is something very different. Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled, but fulfilled according to the promises and not according to our wishes. Therefore, hope is always open-ended.”

“I have found it very important in my life to let go of my wishes and start hoping. It was only when I was willing to let go of wishes that something new, something beyond my own expectations could happen to me. Just imagine what Mary was actually saying in the words, ‘I am the handmaid of the Lord... let what you have said be done to me.’(Luke 1:38) She was saying, ‘I don’t know what this all means, but I trust that good things will happen.’ She trusted so deeply that

her waiting was open to all possibilities. And she did not want to control them. She believed that when she listened carefully, she could trust what was going to happen.”

“To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our own imaginings. So too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to God’s love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy or predication.”

The challenge that now exists for each of us is to live in hope, knowing that we have a future filled with hope as the promises of Scripture take place in our lives. Living in this hope based upon the promises of God’s word involves a radical stance toward life where we surrender to Jesus Christ who is the personification of His will for our lives.

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice