

Hope for the Future

We spoke last week around an important theme that James expresses in His letter to the Hebrews who were scattered around the world of his day

Jas 1:2-4

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

We said that this is actually a very important and consistent theme throughout Scripture

When we work with God:

- The troubles (trials and suffering) we face in this world are turned into something purposeful
- because of the way God uses them in our lives
- Because we know this, we face them:
 - With joyful understanding
 - With a faith that persists
 - And continually grows / matures
 - And we receive a reward from that process

Jas 1:12

¹²Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

The main point made here

- Is for us to know that God uses trouble to produce steadfastness
- The kind of steadfastness that,
- when it is mixed with persistent faith,
 - unswervingly trusting God
 - in pursuit of the purpose He sets before us

As we do He:

- transforms us
 - He makes us perfect,
 - complete
 - and brings us to the point where we lack nothing

This has to do with Him making us whole

It has to do with Him making us like Him

- So that we share in His holiness

And it has to do with Him bringing us through to receive / inherit His promises

In other words,

- James is teaching us that there is something very precious about this steadfastness
- It is something to be desired
- Something to go after
- With joyful understanding
- It is something that will enable us to work with God
- Trusting in Him
- With persistent faith

We touched on How Paul picks up on this theme in his letter to the Romans in chapter 5

Ro 5:1–5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

I want to bring your attention to the word 'hope' here

Hope will always accompany a persistence in faith.

May I quote Michael Eaton from his book on Hebrews (Preaching Through the Bible series)

Eaton

Hope is faith looking forward. It is faith expecting to be rewarded in events still to come. ...God gives us promises: promises of usefulness to others, promises of achievement in the Kingdom, promises of enablement despite weakness, opposition or delay. It is because of the boldness by which we come to God that [the writer] reckons that we shall be able to maintain persistent hope for the future. The God we get to know is one who gives promises and is faithful to what He says to us. Our hope for the future grows by bold acquaintance with the throne of God's grace.

He is commenting here on this passage from chapter 10 in the book of Hebrews

Heb 10:19–25

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

One of the challenges we will face in this world is one of endurance.

- There are obstacles in the way
- The world brings trouble because it is broken
- The devil brings trouble into our lives
- We fail
- We fall
- Others fail us

In all of this God calls us to look to the future

- To continually approach Him at the throne of His grace
- To receive mercy and steadfastness in times of need
- To continue steadfastness in the profession of our faith
 - Which also means that we will continue steadfast in the practical living out of our faith
 - As we press on to maturity in Him

Eaton

We:

- *Become skilled in the word of righteousness (Heb 5)*
- *And we are able to live out the godly life in a practical manner*
- *Grow in godliness*
- *Find our calling*
- *Recognise and overcome the attacks of satan*
- *Persist in faith through trials*
- *Resist and overcome temptation*

- *It is an all-round maturity*
- *It is learning to live on Jesus and receive grace in time of need*

Maturity is:

- *Being totally committed to living out a godly life*
- *A matter of love (Mt 5:43-48)*
- *Freedom from covetousness (Mt 19:21)*
- *Openness to God's voice (1Cor 2:6, Phil 3:15)*
- *Simplicity of talk (1Cor 14:19-21)*
- *Steadfastness in trouble (Jam 1:2-4)*
- *Control of the tongue (Jam 3:2)*
- *Christlikeness (Eph 4:13)*

Testing then:

- is God's way of strengthening us
- of maturing our faith
- and bringing us through to the inheritance He has allocated to us
- – to receiving the promises He has given us
- and entering into HIS rest

Now:

We are exhorted to face everything in this world with hope

- Not only with faith in the moment of trouble
- But we face it with a hope for the future
- Not only a general hope that we will be with God once we leave this world
- But a hope that is expectant of His blessing in this life
- Expectant of the fulfilment of His promises

How does your 'hope meter' look today?

This is so important.

Without hope:

- We can lose heart
- We are in danger of slipping into mediocrity
- Of slipping into neglecting our great salvation
- Of our devotions to God growing cold
- Maybe even in danger of giving up
- Of 'falling' away
- Of missing His grace
- And perhaps of becoming weak in the face of temptation

Three things that I think are important in maintaining hope that we find particularly in the book of Hebrews:

- Approach the throne of grace continuously
- Encourage one another
- Do it 'today'

Our hope for the future grows by bold acquaintance with the throne of God's grace.

His grace is:

- Perfect
- Always sufficient
- Freely and continuously available

We can approach the throne of grace boldly

- With full assurance of faith
- Because of the blood of Jesus
- And we can come at any time
- No matter what state we are in

We are not meant to do any of this persisting / enduring / maturing on our own

We are to:

- Meet together regularly:
- Are warned not to neglect this
- And certainly not to abandon meeting together

We meet regularly to:

- Encourage each other
- To stir each other up to outbursts of love and good works
- To pray for each other

We also meet to be giving expression of our faith together

- Spending time together in God's word
- Helping each other to apply that word

- Spending time in prayer
 - Hearing the voice of God together
 - Doing the work of God that He calls us to in prayer

We do it today

Heb 3:12–15

¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

Consider this:

- We work out our salvation while we are on earth
- We seek the Kingdom first in this age
- We seek to abide in the Vine while in this body
- We bear fruit that will last while we are in this world
- We learn to love God with all our heart, mind and strength in real time – today
- This is where it is meant to happen – in this life
- We will not be working out our salvation in heaven
- We will not be maturing in our faith there
- We do the work of receiving the reward here
- The persistence that receives the promise is done in this life
- The faith that takes hold of the inheritance allotted to us is exercised while we are on earth
- If we do not do it here, there is no chance to do it later

There is therefore both an urgency and an ability to endure for the long term in faith

Hope looks to the future but encourages the heart today

Today is the day God is working this out in your life

Today is the day He is calling you to work with Him

Every day is 'today'

Consider:

We are meant to see the Kingdom coming in this life

- That is at the heart of our prayers
- It is what we hope for

Jesus, in talking about the response of the one who sees this says this:

Mt 13:44–46

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

We do all this though as those who have a hope that will not disappoint us

- When there is opposition or trouble – we persevere
- When there is delay – we have faith and patience
- When we fall – we get up again
- When we fail – we learn from the Father and try again

We have hope because we stand in His grace

We have hope because His love is shed abroad in our hearts

- By the Holy Spirit
- Who He has given to us

Ro 5:1–5

Heb 3:6

⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Heb 4:14–16

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb 6:9–12

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Mt 6:25–34

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Mt 13:18–23

¹⁸ “Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”