

## 14. Hope for doubters

March 15, 2015

There are many words that we can come up with the opposite words immediately, such as, north, south; east, west; tall, short; hot, cold; big, small. But there are also words, not so much opposite at a glance, but as you think more about them, they are polar opposite and mutually exclusive. One of them is hope and doubt. You cannot have hope while you are in doubt, nor can you doubt while you have a sure hope in your heart.

Doubt shakes our faith and crumbles our prayers to nothing more than a few mumbled words. But our gracious Lord can even use our doubt as a precursor to faith. Just as we come to Him through faith, we can come to faith in Him through our doubt. Sometimes we come to the Lord despondently, or defiantly without knowing what is happening behind the unseen world.

I like what Oswald Chambers, an early 20th-century Scottish Bible teacher, best known for the devotional "My Utmost for His Highest," said, "Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong. It may be a sign that he is thinking."

There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind. Unbelief is a matter of the heart. Doubt is when we cannot understand what God is doing and why He is doing it. But unbelief is when we refuse to believe God's Word and do what He tells us to do. We must not confuse the two.

Maybe you have been doubting God's ways in your life. Maybe you have been asking "why" a lot lately. Maybe His timing or things He allows to happen don't seem to make any sense. It all will be resolved in that final day when we stand before Him. God doesn't ask us to understand everything. He asks us to trust Him and follow Him.

*1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

The Jewish Christians in Israel in the first century were targeted and persecuted by their religious leaders in every possible way. In a way, it is still the same. The Israel people love American Christians coming to visit their country in "Holyland Tours" and supporting Israel from here, especially they love our greenback dollars to their economy. But they would make everything extremely difficult if you try to evangelize Christianity to the Jews.

Some of these first century Christian Jews were doubting their faith in Christ and becoming impatient with the Lord for His answers of their prayers. Can we not understand how they felt? Of course, we can, because we've all been there wondering if the Lord even listens to our prayers, maybe some of you are right in the middle of it.

The author of the Book of Hebrews encouraged them with the assurance of their salvation in Christ and reminding them God's faithfulness for their diligent work for His kingdom. And now he goes into God's promises through His Son Jesus Christ, so that they can remove the doubts from their hearts.

## A. GOD'S PROMISE AND OATH

*Hebrews 6:13-16 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.*

People putting their right hands on the Bible and swearing that they would speak, "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God," doesn't mean anything in the courtroom and anywhere else. They would lie even if they know that they can get caught during cross exams by prosecutors or defense attorneys. But when our God says, "I promise," nothing can change it. When He promised to Abraham, He even swore by Himself as a double assurance.

There are times when doubts run rampant in our lives in three categories:

### **1) When things we believe should never happen, happen.**

Though we know that the Lord is righteous, good, just, gracious, loving, and merciful, there are times in life when He seems just the opposite. The Lord sometimes allows things that don't fit His characters to happen in our lives and catch us completely off guard. Then, we wonder and doubt.

### **2) When things we believe should happen, never happen.**

Knowing the Lord with our limited knowledge, our prayer requests should be right in His will, we assume. But praying for healing, prodigals' returns, justice for injustice, and help seem somewhat lost between our hearts and His throne. As we ask, but we don't receive; as we seek, but we don't find; as we knock, but the sound of our bruised knuckles knocking on the throne room's door gives only a hollow echo in reply. Then, our doubts multiply.

### **3) When things we believe should happen now, happens much later.**

We don't like God's answer of 'No', but we can deal with it and try to move on. But none of us like His answer of 'Wait.' All of us have wrestled greatly with His timing. Oh, we say, "His will be done on earth as it is in heaven," but that's for other situations, not ours, we think and hope. One thing for sure, the Lord does His things according to His will and His timetable, not ours AT ALL. And almost invariably, is much later than our faith is prepared for.

The author of this Book chose Abraham as his example, who waited for God's answer to His promise 24 years. The Lord told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son when they were 75 and 65 respectively. But the promise was not fulfilled until Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 years old. I am sure that they became a center of town news for a long time.

During these 24 long years of waiting by Abraham and Sarah, do you think that they had a doubt or two in their hearts? I am sure. If they had, they actively overcame by faith in God.

Then, someone would ask, "What about the shenanigan they pulled – having Ishmael through their maidservant Hagar?" It was their fumbled attempt to help God who does not need their or our help at all. God's will is always best accomplished by divine, not human intervention. Whenever we try to get it in the way, we mess up horribly.

## B. TWO IMMUTABLE THINGS

*Hebrews 6:17-18 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

The promise that the Lord gave to Abraham was not only for him, but also for all the heirs of promise. Abraham and his Jewish descendants are the first of these heirs, but all believers are included as "Abraham's spiritual seed".

*Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

So our assurance of salvation is guaranteed by God's promise and His oath which are far better than the promise of the Federal Reserve Bank.

Two immutable things are God's promise and His oath. The Bible is full of God's promises to carry us through when we need help. According to one person's count, there are 3,573 promises in the Bible. Don't worry. We are not about count all of them to make sure that there are 3,573. He always keeps and fulfills His promises. He is the original Promise Keeper and He never breaks His promises.

*2 Corinthians 1:20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*

We see the phrase "who have fled for refuge" in v18. This comes from "cities of refuge" from Number 35 and Joshua 20 in the OT. The Lord told them to set up 6 cities – 3 on each side of the Jordan River. If a man killed someone accidentally – manslaughter, not murder, he could flee into one of those cities and the elders of the city would determine the case. In the meanwhile, the members of the slain man's family could not avenge themselves so long as the man remained in the city. If they decided that it was truly manslaughter, they would permit the man to live in the city until the death of the high priest. Then he could return to his home.

Listen, we, born-again Christians have fled to Jesus Christ, our eternal refuge. As our High Priest, He will never die and we have eternal salvation. No one can take us out of His loving and protective hands.

## C. JESUS, THE ANCHOR OF OUR SOULS

*Hebrews 6:19-20 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

The Bible was not the first one to use the word 'anchor' as a figure for hope. It was a common symbol in the ancient literature.

Let's think about this anchor. I find three points:

**1) An anchor on the ship doesn't do any good for the ship when the ship needs to be stabilized.**

It is like someone says, "I know that Jesus died for people's sins and He is the Savior of the world. That's really good." Unless we make Jesus our own Savior, not head knowledge, but heart acceptance, we will be tossed to and fro on the stormy sea of life.

**2) The anchor itself may have a strong grip and be secured to the ocean floor, but if it is not securely attached to the ship, it doesn't do any good.**

After we accept the Lord Jesus into our hearts, we must keep our faith in Him for everything we do in our life. Having faith in God is hope in Him. That hope is the rope that connects between the ship, us, and the anchor, Jesus.

**3) However, the anchor analogy doesn't come perfectly in application. We are anchored upward in heaven where our Lord Jesus is, not down in the ground. And we are anchored onto Jesus to move on, not to stand still.**

In the days of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the Hebrews gathered around it and it was a place of worship. Within the Tabernacle were two sets of veils; behind the innermost veil was the holiest place on earth – the Holy of Holies.”

In this Holy of Holies, the Shekinah Glory of God resided. Within that room was an ark, or a small chest, much lower and smaller than most pulpits. On top of that chest was a cover, with golden cherubim on either end with their wings folded in front of them.

Once a year, the high priest of the Israel would enter the Holy of Holies with a small pan of animal's blood which, precisely as God required it in the Law, he poured out on the cover which was called the “Mercy Seat”. God, witnessing the spilling of the blood on behalf of the Israelis and pleased with the sacrifice that had been made correctly by the priest, graciously forgave them for their sin. It was an annual event, the most sacred of all events for the ancient Jews.

For us, our Savior has gone through life, has taken all of our sins on the cross, and has gone before us. And now? Now He pulls us toward Himself. He invites His followers within the veil. He says, “Come on in. Find healing for your heart. Find here the rest that you need.”

Doubt will always try to convince us, “You are all alone. No one else knows, or cares. No one else really can enter in and help you with this.” But in this Book of Hebrews, however, the author says that Christ is the eternal High Priest for us – not once a year, but forever. He lives in the throne room in heaven, sitting at the right hand of the Father, representing our needs to Him.

#### **D. APPLICATIONS**

**1) If you're in that painful space right now, my word for you is, “Persevere! Hope in God. This is not the end.”**

*Psalm 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

**2) God's answers for our prayers are filled with His love and His best interest for us whether it is “Yes,” “No,” even “Wait.” He is not asking us to understand now what He is doing, but just trust Him.**