

Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee. (Psa 33:22)

When we walk in the aftermath of a victory it is easy to feel the warmth of Christ's saving light embracing us and lifting us to great joy. It is easy to transcend, if you will, the senses, the feelings of the flesh to a truly spiritual engagement of God's grace and the love He has expressed toward us.

When we walk in some element of heaviness, feeling as though our God has hidden Himself from us, that joy is difficult to find, because in those moments we tend to walk by sense, by the carnal feelings of the flesh and not in the spirit. The flesh is incapable, through these things we call feelings, emotions, or sense, of knowing the grace of God, because the source of these feelings is enmity against Him

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Rom 8:7)

Paul teaches that the carnal mind doesn't just express or have enmity against God, but that its fundamental essence is that of enmity against God. It is the opposite of what I spoke about near the beginning of the year and how God is love. The core being of fallen man is in every aspect, every thought, every emotion, every breath, heartbeat and synaptic action to be against God.

The truth of this only matters to those who are drawn by the Father to the Son and brought into the knowledge by the Holy Spirit. The fleshly world gives no sign they care that their thoughts and deeds are an affront to their Creator. The Principal Liar capitalizes on this enmity and keeps them in their blinded state. This enmity then results in a state of willing ignorance that consumes them and causes them to deny His power and sovereignty

“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:” (2Pe 3:5)

They are willingly ignorant of the simple fact that God created all things for His own pleasure. They deny this obvious truth, and while Peter specifically speaks to this willing ignorance as a condition of being in the scoffers of the last days (2Pe 3:3) it is not unique to them. Isaiah speaks of this as a trait of Israel's leaders

“His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.” (Isa 56:10)

God's people do not shed this ignorance of their own power; they do so because they are afforded faith and an assurance of that faith's reality. This assurance gives us hope to go forth in the knowledge that even though we are doomed in our flesh by the falling of our first parents, we are quickened by the sacrifice of our Redeemer. Assurance is

directly opposed to the ignorance of the flesh; consider that assurance is different than hope. These are two related but different things. It is certainly important for us to understand what we hope for.

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:” (1Pe 3:15)

If we don't know what we hope in or for, how can we give a reason for it? I delivered a sermon on hope back in September of 2020, and I'm not going to repeat that content here, so if you're looking for more discussion specifically on hope, you can go get that. Today I only remind everyone that our hope isn't some nebulous thing of the flesh that evaporates or gets blown about by the wind or every difficulty of our condition.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;” (1Ti 1:1)

Christ is our hope, our expectation of eternal life, the overcoming of death and sin. That's not nebulous or vague, it's real. It's as solid as the seat you're sitting on. But while we know that it is true, we also know that it is not a thing that can be realized and understood by our physical senses.

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of **things not seen.**”* (Heb 11:1)

We can't see with our eyes, hear with our ears, smell with our noses, taste with our tongue or feel with our hands this substance, but we still know through faith it is there. It drives us to hope in Him and seek His actual presence (as distinguished from a faith-driven sight of Him) for eternity.

I increasingly believe how we view our salvation matters. Understanding the truth of faith and the covenant of Grace is not just academic study. We give God no glory if we do not declare plainly our confession and what that confession means. What we put on display and how we explain the reason for the hope that is in us is a part of our service and our ambassadorship. We should not questioningly say things like “I hope I'm saved” when we talk of salvation. We should walk in and communicate in terms of the assurance of our faith. Listen to these words

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:” (Joh 10:27)

Are you called? Have you heard that voice? If you're sitting in this house having made a confession of faith, there is good indication you have heard it. We aren't supposed to be kicking our toe in the dirt with some “aww, shucks” attitude about being called. Soldiers don't wonder whether they're part of the army going to war. Christ's children

don't hope they're saved, in some vain, empty, fleshly way you hope to get the special prize in your cereal box. They seek absolute assurance of their faith.

Understand that I am not operating under some naivete that men do not delude themselves. We cannot ignore what might be seen as a hard passage of Scripture

“And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”
(Mat 22:12-14)

This is one of those passages that require meditation and sober contemplation. It does not, however, mitigate in any way that we have an assurance of faith that should drive our thoughts and behaviors. The fact that there will be hypocrites – that there will be tares sown in among the wheat – does not eliminate the harvest or its excellence. This should not cause us to be downcast or lessen our declaration for God; sober, yes absolutely, but not hiding our profession or denying it *as a matter of fact*. While I can't know for certain that anyone sitting here today is or is not a tare, I put the best light on each and every person being present here and your manner of life and encourage all of you equally to walk in the full assurance of your faith so that you will take full advantage of the grace that provides to you.

Assurance might be a difficult concept to understand. The word in the English is a little weak, tending toward “inspiring confidence”. That's not strong enough. I think it might help to consider the one place it is used in a negative sense to see what it should mean for us.

*“And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it...And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and **shalt have none assurance of thy life**: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.”* (Deu 28:63,67-68)

This is of course the Lord speaking to the Israelites and what they could expect in the event of their disobedience. No assurance of their lives, compared to the absolute protection they receive when they obey. Lack of assurance in this context is a constant absence of security, so you always want the day you're in to just be over so you can stop being afraid of what you can see, and seeking the morning so you can stop being afraid of what you can't. That level of fear is crippling. The assurance of our faith is the exact opposite of this.

There are many examples in Scripture of someone suffering a failure of faith, which would properly be classified as not having full assurance. These examples are just that – examples. We will most certainly experience the same thing to different degrees at different times over the course of our lives.

I remind you again of this exhortation from Peter

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:” (2Pe 1:10)

We are called upon to exercise the graces Christ has gifted us by doing all that we can in this life to demonstrate our calling is not a delusion, to make it first and foremost sure in our hearts, so that we are engaged with Christ, unified to Him and seeking at a minimum virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity. We must appropriate for ourselves these graces as evidence of our calling. And in appropriating these to ourselves we find the full assurance of our faith. By appropriating them we also glorify our God.

Consider what Paul says to the Hebrews

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)” (Heb 10:22-23)

Without wavering, he says. He not only offers this encouragement, he goes further to declare as a fact that we have boldness to draw near

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,” (Heb 10:19)

He calls us later to not only have confidence but treats it as such a certain thing we should have, that we must be careful not to cast it away!

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.” (Heb 10:35)

Boldness. Full assurance. Confidence. This is our ultimate goal, to walk in such faith that it needs another word to describe it. Faith itself is a remarkable thing, but we can be doubting in our faith. Faith needs exercising so it grows beyond doubts. Faith in our King isn't supposed to be a questionable or wavering thing that comes and goes but as constant as is our heartbeat. Our faith's author is constant, so then shouldn't we be constant? Consider these words from Christ

“If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Luk 12:28)

Nowhere in Paul’s language do you find any room for ideas or words like “guess”, “suppose”, “maybe”, “perhaps”, “likely”, “probable”, etc. There is no sense of “we’ll see at the end of it all if I was right”. We are called to walk in assurance of faith!

When we come to a place of extreme heaviness, there are two paths which we may take – one of the flesh, which drives us into a mode of fixing or working our way out of it or one of the spirit, which is identified by a calm and confident waiting. Not waiting out of resignation or being demandingly arrogant but waiting as a display of faith. A full assurance of faith eliminates fretting and doubt by causing us to see God’s hand working in the things our senses perceive to be bad for us.

In the so-called worst moments of our lives, where according to fleshly measures we are as far from God as can be, it is monumentally important to recognize that we are not walking alone. Understanding that and acting accordingly is what it means to be walking in assurance of faith.

I’m not going to tell you that if you aren’t constantly walking in full assurance of faith, that you don’t have any faith. I have read a number of older expositors that seem to make that case, and I just don’t think that’s right. Like there are babes and young men in the faith, there are those that have attained to a certain level of maturity, and we each have our individual gifts and grace that is afforded us. I cannot abide the thinking that because your expression and exercise of faith doesn’t match someone else’s display that yours is somehow inadequate to your detriment. Scripture specifically calls out the “full” assurance of faith which means to me that there is a “less than full” experience as well.

What I am telling you is that the exercise of your faith should be constantly driving you to seek that confidence and assurance. Like I spoke about last time, the babes or little children in the faith have a different perspective and depth of faith than the young men, who have a different perspective and breadth of their faith than the fathers. Different does not mean better or worse. It is different. What I want to encourage you to hear is to seek this assurance in your faith, not judge someone else’s.

Scripture gives us a number of passages that if we study and **believe them as God’s word** they will help us to settle in our hearts, our minds and our consciences to a place of peace and assurance. These words will bring us closer and closer to Christ as our King, our Father and our Friend. We have title to this assurance, and we should act like it. In seeking it we learn how to draw closer to Christ in unity and gain a peace in our conscience that is provided by Him. The greatest proof of this assurance lies in this passage:

“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” (Heb 6:11-20)

Consider what this passage tells us

- There are promises made and made known to us by an unchangeable, immutable God that have tangible inheritances tied to them – there are heirs to these promises
- Finding this assurance and the confidence it brings to our spirit requires us to not be slothful, to work in the vineyard, to study the word and make that calling and election sure in our hearts and minds so that we recognize the application of these promises to us as beneficiaries (not as something deserved)
- It is by God’s mercy that these promises have been established as an inheritance that is utterly and completely assured with no revocation
- By covenant those beneficiaries are given all the blessings and graces necessary to walk in faith, with individual application
- The promises are guaranteed by an oath that is unbreakable and not dependent upon anything other than the security of that oath across all eternity – no additional action by the recipients, no further assurances or guarantees needed
- It is impossible for God to lie because He is holy, therefore these promises and the graces afforded to the heirs are more guaranteed than the rising of the sun
- If the heirs rest their faith in the fact of this immutability, they will be comforted and find consolation even when they are beset by guilt over sin
- These immutable promises provide an abundant hope to the heirs to latch onto when enemies attack and seek to separate them from their faith
- This hope is a refuge so strong, so binding, so stabilizing it is like an anchor of a ship, which steadies it even when under the influence of great, ominous waves that without the anchor would overwhelm and sink it.

This is perhaps one of the greatest examples in Scripture of how the words, if **truly believed** deliver a pure and complete assurance.

I have made this point several different ways of late, and make it again – the Word is all we need to prove to ourselves the veracity of God’s promises and overcome the abundant distractions Satan uses to put a wedge between us and our God.

Do you believe the words? Do you believe they apply to you unconditionally? If you don’t know what the words say, it is nigh impossible to believe them or apply them to your circumstances. If you don’t treat these words for what they are – communication from God, you simply will not avail yourself of the graces available to carry you through the trials of this life. I am reminded of this incident:

“And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.” (Jdg 6:36-40)

This accounting of Gideon’s seeking a sign provides us a number of lessons. Let me start though with this bit of consolation – you might look at this and not see it as a shining moment for this servant of God. But here’s a takeaway – even if it is a low point for him, it isn’t what he’s most notorious for

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:” (Heb 11:32)

The Holy Spirit doesn’t hide this lapse in Gideon’s faith because it provides us valuable lessons. At the same time, He doesn’t point out the failing as the thing he is remembered for. That should provide considerable consolation.

Gideon teaches us that even a faithful servant has lapses. How many of you have looked at this recounting and thought “God’s talking right to him, how could he not simply believe?”

It’s a good question, but now turn it on yourself, carefully considering all the times you haven’t heard this simple message

“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”
(Psa 37:7)

Or this one

“I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.” (Psa 52:9)

How hard do you find it to hear this

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.” (Psa 27:14)

Do you struggle to find yourself in this mindset

“Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.” (Psa 123:2)

When you are under assault, is this the first place you turn your mind

“And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.” (Isa 8:17)

Do you earnestly find yourself in this company

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isa 40:31)

Is this something you find yourself wrestling with or even rejecting in times of trouble as something that doesn't apply to **your** circumstance

“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.” (Lam 3:26)

Do you see this as being spoken to you, as part of the “we” Paul speaks to or do you isolate yourself away from it

“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” (Gal 5:5)

What I'm trying to tell you, my friends, is that if you read these words and don't see that it is the same God that told Gideon

*"...Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."
(Jdg 6:16)*

I say if you don't see these words, and in reality all the words, as coming from the Lord in the same way they came to Gideon, you're not seeing them in the proper light. If you're not finding comfort and relief in Scripture, I'm suggesting to you that you're not putting it in its proper place; you're not affording the words their proper value. These are not just words, they are The Word, and they are preserved for us as His voice in our time, so they should speak to you as certainly as when He spoke to Gideon.

We should constantly be looking to these words to find and make appropriation of all the blessings promised to us in them. We are not born into the faith fully matured and walking in the full assurance of our faith, but grow into it with diligent application of the promises to our situation. We grow through the study of these precious words.

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)" (Heb 10:22-23)

We have to hold fast, friends. When we profess to have faith in Christ, there are supplies, blessings we gain access to; if we aren't seeking those supplies, we are wasting them, which does a disservice to our Master who provides them.

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev 3:11)

We aren't holding onto anything of the flesh, for as we know, that is vanity.

"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." (Ecc 1:14)

We have the whole catalog of grace, every favor and blessing enumerated in Scripture at our fingertips, that we have to grab ahold of and appropriate for ourselves. This is not some fleshly appropriation out of greed, because these things are not of the flesh. It is an acknowledgement of our Redeemer's interest in us and thankfully glorifying Him by gratefully using what He has left for us.

How do we appropriate these things, grasp them and hold them fast? Especially given they are not things of the flesh, we can't just acquire them. This might be the most

important question we can answer for ourselves. Like all things with God, the answer is simple.

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (Joh 15:16)

That’s all we have to do – ask. Ask in earnest faith and it will be given us.

Now, it’s easy to start over-thinking this and start applying fleshly wisdom to it. Don’t do that. It’s easy to sink into a dark place and reason that since we are engaged in some sin that led to personal darkness these graces are not ours to claim. We can’t think that way, though. We have to reach a faith that forces us to glorify God by engaging Him.

“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (1Pe 4:10-11)

Growing our faith to the pinnacle of having a full assurance of it, so that we don’t waver in our thinking means we will be availing ourselves of the full grace of God, and using those gifts to minister to others. Every time we make use of the things God has given us in a proper way, it glorifies Him, because it glorifies the Father for us to call on Him

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (Joh 14:13)

There is no more valuable a thing we can do than to glorify our God. Grasping these gifts tightly because we truly believe they are for us is a tremendous way to glorify Him. Take these blessings with gratitude and thankfulness toward God. Use them because that is what He has provided them for. Growing more unified in Christ leads to this assurance, which produces peace. We need peace of heart, mind and conscience more than ever when under affliction and heaviness. It is there to be had.

I leave you with this thought from Isaiah:

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.” (Isa 32:17)