

# Laying hold of the hope

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In this week's meditation towards the communion table, we are considering how we *lay hold of the hope* that has been set before us. The apostle Paul declared that 'God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 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'. Heb 6:17-18.

God has revealed the immutability of His purpose to us so that we *might have strong consolation*. However, we do not possess this strong consolation because the hope has been *revealed* to us. Rather, we possess strong consolation because we have *laid hold of the hope* that has been set before us. Strong consolation is the resurrection life of Christ that is becoming our life in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Paul testified to the Corinthians, 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.' 2Co 1:5.

We will not know this strong consolation by 'taking a stand' on what we perceive to be the infallibility of God's promises. Such a religious pursuit invariably leads to disillusionment. It easily becomes a form of testing God that will bring us under His judgement.

On the contrary, we lay hold of the hope that has been set before us by fleeing to Christ for refuge, in response to His word, *to embrace our unique participation* in the fellowship of His offering. It is important to remember that it is only *in Christ* that all of the promises of God are 'yes and amen'. 2Co 1:20. It is impossible to please God or to fulfil His will outside the fellowship of Christ's offering.

The promises of God are 'yes' *in Christ* because the immutable word of the Father for every son of God has been fulfilled in Him. He is the Pioneer of our salvation. He is our Forerunner. Heb 6:20. He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified in Him. Heb 10:14. The promises of God are 'amen' *in Christ* because the immutable word of the Father concerning our sonship is progressively fulfilled in us as we participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering. We are laying hold of the hope that has been set before us as the word of the Father, which is already true in Christ, is becoming true in us. 1Jn 2:8.

The apostle Paul described his ongoing commitment to laying hold of the hope of sonship, in the fellowship of Christ's offering, by saying, 'Not that I have already obtained, or am already perfected; but I press on, *that I may lay hold* of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' Php 3:12-14.

## The fruit of Christ's travail

Jesus Christ is our hope. 1Ti 1:1. The hope that is in the presence of God behind the veil is set before us, or *present with us*, when Jesus Christ comes into our heart. 1Pe 3:15. Heb 6:19.

In this transaction of new birth, we are born to see the kingdom of God. Jn 3:3. The eyes of our heart are enlightened *to see the hope* of our calling as sons of God. Eph 1:18. However, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, we must then proceed to enter the kingdom of God by being born of water and of the Spirit. Jn 3:5. We begin to lay hold of the hope that has been set before us when we are baptised into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

When we are baptised into Christ's death, we are *delivered from* our slavery to sin, and are *delivered to* a new form of doctrine. In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul rejoiced, 'God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.' Rom 6:17. This form of doctrine is not theological information. It is the doctrine of our baptism. That is, we are delivered to our unique participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, in which the immutable word of the Father is fulfilled in our life.

In the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, the other law is being circumcised from our heart. This is an important part of the operation that God is performing in our heart. Col 2:11-12. However, it would be a mistake to limit the operation of God to the removal of 'the other law'. The major focus of God is to pour His love, which is the divine nature, into our heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Rom 5:5. As the love of God is poured into our heart, we progressively become *obedient from the heart* to the form of doctrine to which we have been delivered. It is this miraculous change of motivation that transpires in our heart, which also compelled Paul to proclaim, 'God be thanked!' Rom 6:17.

The love of God that is poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit *is the same love* that was poured into the heart of Yahweh the Son through the Holy Spirit when He was begotten by the word of the Father as the Son of God. Col 1:13. 1Jn 4:7. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples, and for each of us, saying, 'I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that *the love with which You loved Me may be in them*, and I in them.' Joh 17:26. The love of God was revealed and declared by Jesus through each wounding event that He endured from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross in full obedience to the Father's will.

Furthermore, the love of God that was *poured into* the heart of Christ was *poured out* from His heart as the fruit of His travail on this same obedient pathway of offering. This is an amazing point! We know that the end of His obedience was not in His own hands. It was in the hands of the Father. The fruit of Christ's travail was fully seen when the soldier pierced His side with a spear. Blood, water *and the Spirit* flowed like a river from His wounded heart. 1Jn 5:6. Joh 19:34-37. Zech 12:10.

The Holy Spirit has not been given to us to help us to cope with life in a fallen world or to help us to achieve our own religious aspirations. The Holy Spirit is not empowering our carnality. Rather, it is the Spirit who frustrates our attempts to fulfil the will of God in the strength of our own flesh. Gal 5:17. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to join us to the fellowship of Christ's prayer and offering. The love of God that was poured out, as the fruit of Christ's travail, is poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

## The love of God poured into our hearts

In his letter to the Romans, Paul explained the process by which the love of God is poured into our heart. It begins when we become poor in spirit and cease from asking the Holy Spirit to empower us so that we can serve God in a manner that we have determined for ourselves. Rather, we acknowledge that we do not even know how to pray. Rom 8:26. The Holy Spirit helps our weakness by making intercession for us with groanings too deep for

words. The prayer of the Spirit in us reveals His desire to take what belongs to Christ and to disclose it to us. Joh 16:15. Jas 4:5.

The Holy Spirit joins us to the travail of Christ who searches our heart with eyes like a flame of fire, and makes intercession for us according to the will of God. Rom 8:27. As our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, it is Christ who prays to the Father on our behalf, 'Not My will, but Yours, be done.' Luk 22:42. Significantly, the Father's *first response* to the prayer of Christ is to begin to pour the love of God into our heart through the Holy Spirit, who is also making intercession for us. When the love of God is poured into our heart, it is a *birthing action* by the Father in the fellowship of Christ's travail.

As those who *love God*, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts, we can then be assured that God is working all things together for our good through the course of each day. Rom 8:28. The immutable purpose of God is being fulfilled in our lives as we continue to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering. Paul concluded his discussion on this process by declaring, 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created things, shall be able to separate us from *the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*' Rom 8:39.

## Your life is hidden with Christ in God

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul also addressed the subject of our baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He said, 'If then you were raised with Christ, *seek those things which are above*, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things on the earth.' Col 3:1-2. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He forever lives to make intercession for us, and continues to minister His life to us in the fellowship of His offering. Rom 8:34. Heb 7:25.

As we have considered, our participation in Christ's offering begins by praying in the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Spirit keeps us in the fellowship of prayer where the love of God is being poured into our heart. Jud 1:20-21. It is important to recognise that, as sons of God who have been set free from our slavery to sin, we have the capacity to choose whether we will set our mind on the things of the Spirit *or* on the things of the flesh. Rom 8:5. If we do not prioritise the need to pray regularly in the Holy Spirit, it reveals that our mind is set on the things of this world, and that we are placing our trust in the strength of our own flesh.

There is no reason for us to be concerned with the events that are transpiring in the world or to be consumed with the affairs of this life, because we have already died with Christ! The world has been crucified to us and we have been crucified to the world. Gal 6:14. We recognise that the world, and everything in it, has been judged by the offering of Christ. Joh 12:31. In the end of the age, both the earth, and the works that are in it, will be burned up. 2Pe 3:10. Significantly, if we have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope that has been set before us, we no longer belong to this world. Our citizenship is in heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. Php 3:20. Paul said, 'For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.' Col 3:2-3.

When we consider the meaning of our baptism and its ongoing reality for our life, we recognise that our old man has been crucified with Christ. Rom 6:6. However, it is also *the life of new creation* that we lay down in the fellowship of His offering. 1Jn 3:16. It is the life of new creation that is hidden with Christ in God. If our life is hidden, it means that we are safe and secure. Our hope is secure and steadfast. It also means that we are no longer

preoccupied with our profile and achievements in this world or in the church. Rather, our preoccupation is to reveal Christ, and our brethren, who are members of the body of Christ.

As a son of God who is hidden with Christ in God, we do not reveal our own sonship. Importantly, this does not mean that our sonship is not seen or revealed! We know that Jesus Christ did not come to reveal Himself. His preoccupation was to reveal the name of the Father, and to be obedient to the Father's will. Nevertheless, the nature of His obedience to the Father's word was completely consistent with the name and the priestly work that He had received from the Father before the foundation of the world. Heb 5:5-6. This is why Jesus said to the Jews, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.' Joh 8:28.

In the same way, when the love of God is poured into our heart, we are motivated to reveal Christ and to be obedient to His word. The love of God enables us to offer ourselves, and thereby fulfil the command of Christ to lay down our life for one another. Joh 13:34. However, because we will do this in a very unique way, according to the name that we have received from our heavenly Father, the firstfruits of our sonship is seen as we reveal another in the body of Christ.

Having identified that our life is hidden with Christ in God, Paul continued to say that 'when Christ who is our life is revealed, then we will also be revealed with Him in glory'. Col 3:4. We know that this verse has a specific application to our resurrection to immortality in the last day. 1Jn 3:2. However, it also describes the fundamental principle of offering that exists in the body of Christ, here and now. It is important to remember that the glory of our resurrection body at the last day will be commensurate with our growth and maturity as a son of God in the fellowship of offering in the body of Christ, during our lifetime. 1Co 15:35-49. 2Co 5:1-10.

## Encouraging one another

In the context of discussing our growth and maturity as a son of God, here and now, Paul admonished the Corinthian church by saying, 'Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.' 1Co 13:13. Faith, hope and love are all virtues that belong to Jesus Christ. As we press on to lay hold of our unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering, these virtues of Christ are given to us and become our most precious possessions. The love of God is the divine nature. It is the foremost of these three virtues because *our faith works by love* and *our hope is fulfilled* as the love of God is poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit. Gal 5:6. Rom 5:5.

What does it mean to abide in faith, hope and love as a son of God? In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul helpfully *expanded his admonition* concerning these three virtues. He emphasised that it is our personal accountability as a son of God to continually lay hold of the fellowship in which these virtues of Christ are established in our life. An ongoing commitment to abide in faith, hope and love is the hallmark of a firstfruits Christian who is pressing on to maturity as a son of God.

In *relation to faith*, Paul said, '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.' Heb 10:22. The faith of Christ is given to us as a gift when we receive the word that is ministered to us by His messengers. Rather than *drawing back* in unbelief or condemnation, the faith of Christ compels us to *draw near* to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and to receive grace each day. The mercy of God is expressed toward us in the blood

that cleanses our conscience and by the water of the word that sanctifies us so that we can present our body as a living sacrifice to God.

In *relation to hope*, Paul said, 'Let us hold fast *the confession of our hope* without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.' Heb 10:23. Jesus Christ is the High Priest of our confession. Heb 3:1. Heb 4:14. When we encounter difficult circumstances in our life, we do not need to waver in anxiety or to let go of our confession. Rather, we hold fast to the confession that Jesus Christ has already accomplished the perfect will of God for our life. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. As our great High Priest, He is faithfully ministering His resurrection life to us in the events of each day as we continue to embrace our participation in His offering.

Finally, in *relation to love*, Paul said, 'Let us consider one another in order *to stir up love* and good works.' Heb 10:24. In the first instance, Paul was not saying that we need to think about how we can stir up love in someone else. We are *considering and esteeming one another* so that the love of God that we have received is stirred up in our heart toward our brethren! In the fellowship of Christ's offering, our mind is being renewed. We are becoming less preoccupied with our own circumstances, and more focused on how to lay down our life for one another. Offering that is motivated by love to reveal another is *the good work* that the Father has prepared for us to do as a son of God. Eph 2:10.

Paul concluded his admonition by saying that we are 'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but *exhorting one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching'. Heb 10:25. Our personal commitment to lay hold of the hope that has been set before us is expressed as we participate in the communion meal each week. Moreover, when we meet and relate together as families and friends in the body of Christ, it is our opportunity to encourage and *exhort one another*. We are encouraging each other to draw near in full assurance of faith, to hold fast the confession of our hope, and to consider one another to stir up love.