

A FUTURE AND A HOPE

- A. Introduction: We've been talking about the importance of learning to acknowledge God, to thank and praise Him continually, in the good times and in the bad—no matter how you feel or what is happening in your life. Ps 34:1; I Thess 5:18; Eph 5:20; Col 3:15
1. This is easier to do when your view of reality (your perspective) is shaped by God's Word. The Bible reveals unseen realities (things not perceptible to our physical senses). When you know that there is more to life than what you see and feel in the moment it affects the way you deal with life's challenges.
 - a. The Bible tells us about God, who is invisible (I Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27). It assures us that He is with us and for us, and that He will help us in our time of trouble (Ps 46:1). Therefore, we can thank and praise Him before we see Him or His help.
 - b. The Bible also gives us historical accounts of real people who faced real hardships and got real help from God. These accounts encourage us in the midst of challenges. They help us thank and praise God because, just as He has helped countless others, He will help us. Rom 15:4
 2. There are two kinds of unseen realities. There things we can't see because they are invisible, namely God and His kingdom of power and provision that can and does affect the physical, material world.
 - a. But there are also things we can't see because they are yet to come, in the life after this life. Critical to living a life of praise and thanksgiving is living with the awareness that there's more to life than just this life, and knowing that the best is ahead for those who know the Lord.
 - b. In the next part of our series on praising God we're going to look at what is ahead according to the Bible, and how this information makes life easier to deal with—no matter your circumstances.
- B. We've already made a number of references to statements that Paul the apostle made in a letter (an epistle) he wrote to Hebrew Christians. These people were experiencing increasing pressure from their fellow countrymen because of their faith in Jesus as the Messiah (the Christ, the Anointed One).
1. The entire epistle is an exhortation written to urge them to stay faithful to Jesus no matter what happens. Paul used a number of tactics in this letter, one of which was to remind them of how they had already responded to persecution and then encourage them to keep it up.
 - a. Heb 10:32-34—Paul recounted that when they first came to faith in Christ, they were ridiculed and beaten. Some were jailed and others lost property. But, Paul reminded them that they took it joyfully, knowing that “you had better things waiting for you in eternity” (v34, NLT).
 - b. The Greek word that is translated joyfully is a form of a word we've referred to a number of times over the past couple of months. It means to be cheerful (as opposed to feel cheerful).
 1. When you cheer someone you encourage them by reminding them why they have hope. You give them reasons why they can be certain that they'll make through whatever they are facing.
 2. This isn't an emotional response. Paul used the same word when he talked about rejoicing when he was sorrowful (II Cor 6:10). This is a willful action based on knowledge.
 2. These Hebrew Christians were able to cheer (encourage) themselves because they knew there were better things waiting for them in them in eternity. No one ceases to exist when they die.
 - a. All humans have an inward, immaterial portion to their makeup (spirit and soul, or our mental and emotional faculties) as well as an outward physical portion (the body). II 4:16; I Thess 5:23
 1. At death, the inward and outward part separate. The body returns to dust and the inward part (you, minus your physical body) passes into another dimension (Luke 16:19-31). Which dimension you enter depends on how you responded to the light of Jesus that was given to you during your lifetime.
 2. Those who die in right relationship with God through Jesus go into a place called Heaven. (Many lessons for another day. For a more complete discussion, read my book: *The Best Is*

Yet To Come; What The Bible Says About Heaven).

- b. The point for our present discussion is that these people were able to endure hardship because they knew that there is something better ahead, in the life after this life. Paul wrote: You knew that you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in Heaven. Don't throw away your trust now—it carries with it a rich reward in the world to come (Heb 10:35, J. B. Phillips).
3. To appreciate what Paul was telling these Hebrew Christians about treasure and reward in the world to come, you must understand the big picture. This is the big picture:
 - a. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 1. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, beginning when the first man, Adam, disobeyed God. Life in this world—with its pain, suffering, corruption, injustice, and loss—is not the way God created it to be or intended it to be.
 2. Because Adam was the head of the human race and earth's first steward, his actions affected both the race resident in him and the earth itself.
 - A. Human nature was altered. Men and women became sinners by nature, disqualified for God's family. And, the earth (this planet and the entire universe) was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Rom 5:19; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 8:20; I Cor 7:31; etc.
 - B. Rom 5:12—When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so everything began to grow old and die, for all sinned (TLB).
 - b. This turn of events did not take God by surprise. He already had a plan in mind to deal with the destruction caused by sin and reclaim His family and the family home through Jesus. This plan is called redemption. To redeem means to deliver from bondage.
 1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the debt we owed for sin. Because of His death on the Cross sinners can be delivered from the guilt of sin and transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ—restored to our created purpose. John 1:12-13
 2. Jesus will come again to restore the family home by removing every trace of sin, corruption, and death from this planet and the universe. He will restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. Life on earth will finally be what we all long for it to be. Rev 21-22
4. As we said a moment ago, when a believer dies they (the immaterial part of their makeup) leave their body behind and enter Heaven. With the exception of a few people (Enoch, Elijah) everyone in Heaven is separated from their physical body. However, the present invisible Heaven is temporary.
 - a. God never intended for men and women to be disembodied spirits living in an immaterial realm. Separation from the body is a consequence of death (which is in the world because of Adam's sin). God created human beings to live with a body in a physical, material world—this earth.
 1. In connection with Jesus' second coming, resurrection of the dead will occur. All who are in Heaven will be reunited with their physical body, raised from the grave and made immortal and incorruptible—no longer subject to sickness, injury, old age, or death. I Cor 15:20-23; 50-54
 2. Also in connection with Jesus' second coming, this world will be renovated into what the Bible calls the new heavens (the atmosphere around us and outer space) and new earth. The Greek word that is translated new (*kainos*) means new in quality and superior in character.
 - b. The Hebrew Christians that Paul wrote to had a perspective shaped by the Old Testament. They knew from the writings of the prophets that God is going to restore the earth to pre-sin conditions, establish His visible kingdom on earth, and live with His people forever. Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27
 1. In one of Peter's earliest sermons preached shortly after Jesus returned to Heaven, the apostle made the following statement: Acts 3:21—(Jesus) will remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets (NLT)
 2. John the apostle saw the restored earth in a vision Jesus gave him: Then I saw a new heaven

and a new earth...I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, Look the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evil are gone forever (Rev 21:1-4NLT).

c. Let's go back to Hebrews 10, where Paul reminded these Christians that they took their initial persecutions joyfully, knowing "you had better things waiting for you in eternity" (v34, NLT).

1. Paul urged them to exercise patient endurance and trust God because "You will receive all that he has promised. For in just a very little while, the Coming One will come and will not delay" (Heb 10:36-37, NLT).

2. Note that Paul connected their hope of something better to the second coming of Jesus. Jesus is coming back to this world to complete God's plan for a family by restoring the family home.

A. We will be reunited with our bodies raised from the grave to live on earth again—this time forever, without the loss, pain, and suffering that permeates this world.

B. God's intention is not to simply fix up this sin damaged world. He's going to root out the cause of all the heartache (sin and death) and supernaturally restore this world to all that He intends it to be—a perfect home for Himself and His family.

1. It's much easier to rejoice and thank and praise God, when your view of reality has been shaped by the big picture. This life is not our only chance at life on earth.

2. At the end of his letter Paul wrote: "For this world is not our home; we are looking forward to our city in heaven, which is yet to come" (Heb 13:14, NLT). Once God's plan of redemption is completed Heaven will be on earth. That's the big picture.

C. Let's consider two spectacular examples of how living with the awareness that there is more to life than just this life enabled two men in very difficult circumstances to praise the Lord—Jeremiah and Habakkuk.

1. These two men were prophets raised up by God to prophesy to His people Israel during a time of national danger. Jeremiah ministered from 627 BC to 586 BC, and Habakkuk from 609 BC to 605 BC.

a. In 722 BC the northern part of the nation (known as Israel) was conquered by the Assyrian Empire and much of the population removed Israel. By the time of Jeremiah and Habakkuk, the southern part of the nation (known as Judah) was facing the same fate at the hands of the Babylonian Empire.

b. Centuries earlier, when God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery and brought them back to their ancestral land (Canaan or Israel), He warned them that if they worshipped the gods of the people who lived around them, they would be overrun and defeated by their enemies. Deut 4:25-28

1. By Jeremiah and Habakkuk's day, God's people were deep in idolatry and all the related vile and immoral practices. God sent prophets to call them to repentance. The north (Israel) didn't listen and was destroyed. The south (Judah) was next.

2. God raised up both Jeremiah and Habakkuk to prophesy to Judah. Neither man's message was received. The nation as a whole did not repent and national destruction came.

3. These righteous men, who acted righteously, obeyed God and delivered the messages they were given, both experienced the consequences of unrighteous decisions made by unrighteous men.

Why? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth.

2. Habakkuk knew that destruction was coming. His book is more of a prayer than a prophesy. He asked the Lord several questions regarding Judah's situation, waited for answers, and then responded to God's answers (lessons for another day). Note one passage.

a. Hab 3:17-19—Habakkuk concluded his book with a tremendous statement about praising God no matter what. His nation was facing destruction and his people were headed to a long captivity in Babylon, but Habakkuk was determined to rejoice.

1. This is a real person facing real hardship. Habakkuk was not being poetic when he wrote about

fig trees that don't blossom and fields without flocks and herds. He lived in an agricultural society. No crops and no herds meant no food which meant starvation.

2. Habakkuk couldn't have been happy about what he and his nation were facing. Yet he said: I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength. He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains (Hab 3:18-19, NLT).

A. Habakkuk made a choice to rejoice: Even though the complete collapse of life as I know it is coming, I will rejoice—as opposed to I feel like rejoicing.

B. I will rejoice in the Lord who is my strength and salvation. This sounds like what Paul said when he was in a Roman jail (Phil 4:11-13): I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. He is my sufficiency. He is the God who is more than enough. He will get me through until He gets me out.

C. The Hebrew word that is translated joyful means to jump for joy or spin around. It is sometimes translated exult which is from a Latin word that means to be extremely joyful.

You can be truly excited in the midst of great adversity because of the hope you have.

b. Note how this verse is translated in the Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Old Testament. (While Israel was captive in Babylon, Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the common language, hence the Aramaic translation.) It says: But in the Word of the Lord I will rejoice (Hab 3:18).

1. By the time of Judah's destruction God had revealed through His Word that a Redeemer is coming to who will restore the earth to pre-sin conditions, raise the dead, establish His kingdom on earth, and live with His people forever. Job 19:25-26; Dan 7:27; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2

2. The historical record doesn't say what happened to Habakkuk. But we know where he is now He's in the invisible Heaven, enjoying all its blessings as he awaits his return to the new earth.

3. Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He survived, but was taken captive by other survivors who then tried to resist the Babylonians through guerilla warfare. (Jeremiah, at the direction of the Lord, had urged surrender to Babylon). The guerillas fled to Egypt for protection from Babylon and took Jeremiah with them, where he prophesied for about five years and eventually died.

a. Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, a book of five poems. It is an expression of grief written just after the destruction of Jerusalem on Aug 10, 586 BC. Consider one passage—Lam 3:18-26.

1. In the midst of his grief over genuine tragedy, Jeremiah recalled to his memory God's goodness and unfailing love, along with the fact that he would ultimately see the salvation of God.

2. The prophet understood the big picture—there is more to life than just this life and God's people have a purpose that is bigger than this life. Therefore, no matter what catastrophe we face now, we have a future, and that gives us hope in the midst of calamity.

b. Jeremiah also wrote a well known but often misapplied verse, Jeremiah 29:11—For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future (NIV).

1. This statement is not a promise for this life. It was given to people who were about to see their nation destroyed, then be forcibly removed from their land to live as captives in a foreign country for the next seventy years. Most of them never saw their homeland again.

2. Jer 29:11 is a promise based on the big picture—the ultimate restoration of this world when Jesus returns. That was their hope and future. That is our hope and our future.

D. Conclusion: The second coming of Jesus is approaching. The Bible makes it clear that perilous times will precede His return. Things are going to get much worse in this world before they get better. We must learn how to keep our eyes on the big picture and learn to acknowledge God (thank and praise God) no matter what we see or feel. We must be convinced that the best is yet to come. (Much more in upcoming lessons!)