

March 21, 2021

Dear Brethren and Coworkers,

Those of us living in the northern hemisphere are beginning to see the days get longer and feel the weather become more comfortable as Winter turns to Spring. Perhaps the phenomenon of the turning season bringing an expectant hope along with the improving climate is personal to me, but I believe that there are others who feel the same optimism. After what seems like a year-long winter of shutdowns and orders to stay home, with the world virtually imprisoned, people everywhere share the opinion that it's about time for things to improve. Of course, whether the worldly circumstances in the coming months will improve or not remains to be seen.

The question to consider is about what the object of our hope is. What do you hope for? Are you hoping for the ability to go out into public without fear of catching a disease? Are you hoping for the ability to see the smiles on strangers' faces again? Are you hoping that you can carry out your activities in life without concern about being the target of judgment from people who have different opinions as to what constitutes "proper social conduct"? All of these are things that I hope for, and I'm sure that many of you can relate.

Yet, we must be aware that these kinds of changes for an improved quality of life that we hear about in the media and from the people in our communities are very short-sighted. Sure, lifting lockdowns and improved health in our communities are good things, but they are nothing more than momentary in the grand plan of God. To hope for worldly improvements is not wrong, but we need to hope for much, much more. Our hope must be focused on the long-term fulfillment of God's plan.

Long-term thinking doesn't come very easily to most people in this age. With technology enabling the flow of information so rapidly, an idea sparked in conversation can turn very quickly into an immediate purchase with same-day delivery. We don't have to wait for much of anything these days. Why would anyone have the patience to wait for God's plan to come to fruition to improve the state of the world when politicians and business magnates sell the promise of making the world better now? Sadly, Satan has deceived the world to believe that our state of being will improve at the hands of man. The patience of so many has grown so thin as to discount God's intervention entirely. The world doesn't want God's solutions, but that is truly the only hope we have.

Perhaps our circumstances affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will improve temporarily—time will tell. But we know that whatever worldly improvements we might benefit from will be short-lived, and that they aren't worth much anyway. Even more, the Bible instructs us not to place our love in worldly things at all! "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). Any hope that we have for an improved quality of life must be tempered with the knowledge that the true hope for a better life requires long-term thinking, patience, and faith in God, not man.

Moses provides us with a great example of the kind of long-term thinking that we must have. When he was in Egypt, he made a choice. As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he was effectively a member of the royal family. Yet, he knew that he was a Hebrew and that his heritage belonged with his own people. Moses made a decision to forsake the privileges and comforts of life for something he considered to be much greater. "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called

the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them" (Hebrews 11:24-28). As prevalent as his trials were, Moses dedicated his life to the hope for a better future for his people. He could have taken a much easier path in life, choosing a way of privilege rather than hardship. But instead, he believed in God. Moses trusted that His Way was the best way, even if it meant enduring indefinite adversity. And then he acted upon those beliefs.

From this example of Moses enduring trials and dedicating his life to godly obedience, we can draw inspiration. Are we likewise focused on the long-term goal set before us—to turn our lives away from the sin and spiritual slavery? Or are we distracted by what's right in front of us? Are we trying to improve the uncomfortable worldly circumstances? The Israelites had a similar goal that Moses had—to flee the bondage of Egypt, but they were not focused on the reasons why it was important to leave that bondage. Moses knew that it was critical to leave Egypt so Israel could draw near to God, but the Israelites were only thinking about the short-term benefit. As a result, when they wandered in the wilderness, they quickly found cause to complain. Had they been thinking about the ultimate goal of life in the Promised Land, the difficulties they faced would have been much more tolerable. Considering this example, we are obliged to evaluate our own focus. Do we really have anything to complain about? Certainly, we can easily come up with things in our lives that we don't like, but are they worth our investment of time, attention, and other resources? However, it should be clear that we are better off placing our hope into a future that's eternally and infinitely better.

With the Passover and Spring Holy Days upon us, it is time to consider our dedication to God. So much of this season involves evaluating ourselves so we can uncover the sins that lurk in the dark corners of our lives and remove them. There may be sins in our life that masquerade as righteous acts, but instead only serve our all-too-human short-term thinking. We may have sins that have become rote habit, turning invisible to our own eyes. We may have sins that are simply very difficult to overcome. Whatever we face now, we need to remember that the improvement we are called to work on is the long-term kind that begins with overcoming sin, not the short-term change that feels good for a moment. The world will tell us otherwise, but we know better. Our investment for our great future involves making payments today in the currency of righteousness.

With the emergence of Spring, we all have tremendous hope. But not the kind of hope that results in a little more comfortable life. Quite the contrary. Those minor improvements in the quality of life are nothing, comparatively speaking. We have something much greater. We have hope for God's Way of Life to prevail. We have hope that our sins will be forgiven through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We have hope for an eternal life, ruling with Christ in the Kingdom of God. To fulfill this hope, our job is to follow the examples set before us, and invest into the great future, while forsaking the distractions of the world. Our job is to think big.

In Christ's Service,



Eric Rank