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GOD'S PROMISES

LIVING BETWEEN HOPE AND HOME

Read *Colossians 3:1-4*

Woe betides the traveler on I-94 who fails to slow from 70 to 55 miles per hour when crossing the Indiana state line from Illinois! When crossing state lines, one has to watch one's "step." For the Christian, this advice takes on a much deeper meaning. We constantly have to straddle the line between heaven (the state in which we have our true citizenship) and earth (the state in which we currently reside). The rules and regulations of conducting our lives in each place couldn't be more different.

In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul outlines the basic differences between the two places. After human beings are born into this world, they grow up as citizens of this world. Human nature, defiled as it is by sin, is attuned only to the sights, sounds, and impulses of this world. We were spiritually dead, Paul says, when we followed the ways of this world (Eph. 2:1). But when we came to know Christ, we were raised with Him into a new world—the heavenly realm. Christians undergo a citizenship transfer (Phil. 3:20) when they accept and believe in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. They become "strangers and exiles" in the world in which they had once been so comfortable (Heb. 11:13).

This change in citizenship will have dramatic results. Paul says we are to "set [our] mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2); this statement has major lifestyle ramifications. Christians undergo a total paradigm shift when their hearts are transformed by Christ's love. The goal is to be so transformed that others will see and be attracted to the new life and citizenship that Christians enjoy.

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So as Christians, while we physically live here, we live by the rules of heaven. But a different day is coming, Paul goes on to say—a time when we will live where our citizenship is: in heaven. That will happen when Christ appears in His glory at the end of this age (Rev. 1:7). At that time, the boundary line between heaven and earth will disappear. That's when our hope will become our home.

If straddling the boundary between heaven and earth becomes difficult at times, don't despair. The glory of Christ's appearing will soon erase every trace of that line.

God's Promise:

You are destined to live in the glory reserved for His Son.

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REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart

WALKING BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, You rule the universe but chose to become intimately immersed in human history on planet Earth. You have gradually unfolded the mysteries of Your sovereign plan in the developing stories of Scripture, and You see ends that are impossible for any of Your creatures to fathom. While we are on this earth, we walk by faith and not by sight, knowing that the only worthy object of our faith is Your unchanging character and Your sure promises. As I read Your Word, I see with greater clarity that faith in Your promises runs contrary to appearances, because You call me to hope in the unseen and the not-yet. Yet You have given me the holy invitation to risk everything I have and everything I am on the promises that will not be fulfilled in this life, but in the new realm You are preparing for Your people.

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Psalm 119: A Biblical Perspective on Affliction

The longest in the Psalter, Psalm 119 is a magnificent collection of prayers and affirmations concerning the wisdom, wealth, and wonder of God's revealed Word. This beautifully crafted acrostic poem has 22 stanzas corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza contains eight lines that begin with the same letter. The eight-line structure reflects how the psalm rings the changes on eight synonyms for Scripture (law, precepts, statutes, word, commandments, testimonies, judgments, ordinances) in all but three of its 176 verses (I will leave it to you to figure out which three!). This carefully embroidered artistic pattern does not stifle but showcases the passion the psalmist has for the moral beauty of God's truth.

One of the great themes of this monumental psalm is the believer's proper response to affliction and adversity. As we have seen in our series on the Psalms, they express the full range of human emotions—from the depths of despair

to the heights of joy. The Hebrew poets did not disguise their struggles but openly acknowledged their feelings before the Lord during times of pain, grief, and doubt, and affirmed their willingness to cling to Him in spite of their circumstances. So it is in Psalm 119: "Look upon my affliction and rescue me, for I do not forget Thy law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word. . . . Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, yet I do not turn aside from Your testimonies" (vv. 153–154, 157).

A Relationship, Not a Solution

It is simplistic and unbiblical to think that by coming to Christ, we will be protected from pain and adversity in this life. People are often prompted to come to Him for all the wrong reasons—to have a better marriage, a better career, financial prosperity, happiness, good health, and so on. But Christianity is not a religion of solutions; it is a relationship

with the Savior. It is not a conquering of our problems, but a commitment to a Person. The Lord calls us to pursue Him apart from any benefits He may provide. We must love the Giver for Himself, and not for His gifts, because all that He gives pales in comparison to knowing Him, the personal Source of every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift (James 1:17).

Two Different Perspectives

The psalmist understood this and knew that the sovereign God can use even affliction as an instrument of His grace. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. . . . I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me" (Ps. 119:67, 71, 75). Without a biblical perspective, no one could make such affirmations. When we suffer, we will either view our circumstances in light of God's character and promises, or we will view God's character and promises in light of our circumstances. The former perspective is biblical and can make us better people; the latter perspective is more typical and can make us bitter people.

The key to embracing a biblical perspective on our circumstances is renewing our minds with the Word of God on a consistent basis. This was the practice of the author of Psalm 119. "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You. . . . I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways. I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word . . . Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me through Your righteousness" (Ps. 119:11, 15–16, 40). Notice how the psalmist views his adversities through the lens of Scripture:

Remember the word to
Your servant,
In which You have made
me hope.
This is my comfort in my
affliction,
That Your word has revived
me . . .
If Your law had not been
my delight,
Then I would have
perished in my affliction.
I will never forget Your
precepts,
For by them You have
revived me . . .
I am exceedingly afflicted;
Revive me, O LORD,
according to Your word ...
Look upon my affliction
and rescue me,

For I do not forget Your law.
Plead my cause and redeem me;
Revive me according to Your
word . . .
Many are my persecutors and
my adversaries,
Yet I do not turn aside from
Your testimonies. (Ps. 119:49–
50, 92–93, 107, 153–154, 157)

We must come to the point where we are willing to admit two truths about ourselves: (1) although we think we do, we do not really know what our best interests are, and (2) even if we did, we could not achieve them on our own. Only an omniscient, loving, and sovereign God knows and wants what is truly best for us—and is capable of bringing it about.

The Scriptures assure God's children of purpose and hope. We will not grasp most of these words in this life, but there are wise and loving purposes behind the things we do not understand. Our task is to set our hope solely on God's character and promises. "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

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