

Hoping Fully in Heaven

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Date: 10 July 2016

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[0:00] We are at war. I think that's good for us to remember. We saw that just this morning. But just to say that we are at war. There are combatants in this battle that we are in.

The Lord Jesus was born to destroy the works of the devil. He was on a war mission. But the devil is not going to go silently into the night.

Knowing that his time is short, he rages all the more against the church. And so we are caught up in this battle. And there's combatants on each side. And there are casualties.

There are casualties in this war. The devil is taking casualties. His army shrinks with every true conversion. And I wish we could say that there are no casualties on our side.

But that's not true. There are casualties. Pastors who were wearing the captain's hat. The captain's sword. The captain's insignia.

[1:01] Out in front. They've been shot down. Seduced. Drug aside. Sidelined. Out of the ministry. But it's not just pastors. It's all professing believers.

Led astray by their own evil desires. Or like what we saw this morning. Going after things that their itching ears wanted to hear.

Going after teachers that don't teach the gospel anymore. Or they've left the religion altogether. And so here they are. In some, it's not so drastic as that.

If you're wounded. You're as much of a casualty as if you're killed. And some Christians walk around wounded on the field.

So full of holes. So full of doubts. So full of inner strife. That the devil has effectively sidelined them in this battle. So there's combatants.

[2:00] There's casualties. There's plots. And there's schemes. The devil is a schemer. We know that. He's a planner. He very rarely does anything on the spur of the moment.

And his, all of his demons know how to scheme and plan as well. I want you to think the demons have a much longer life than we have.

70, 80 years. 80 years. But the whole time they live. And so they can afford to slowly unhatch their plans. They can afford to take their time with you.

They can afford to feed a thought here. To feed a desire there. To steer ever so gently. You know, when you're steering a boat, all it takes to be eventually completely off is just a degree.

You're steering towards the shore. But you just take a degree to the north. Go on long enough and you're hundreds of miles away from your intended destination. And so there's no need for a sudden win.

[3:05] They can wait to do the most possible damage. You realize that? They can wait 20, 30 years until their full scheme for your life is unhatched, comes to fruition.

You know how meatpacking factories do it? If you have a... They usher the cows in. There's no bright lights.

There's no sudden change of scenery. And they slowly curve them and gather them into a nice little line. And then, before you know it, there's a conveyor belt underneath the cow's feet.

Slowly taking them along. And pretty soon, gently, bars come underneath them. Pick the cow up.

And the cows don't notice the thing. And at the end, a man with a very elegant gun called a stunner that shoots an iron rod about the size of a pencil. Puts that thing between the cow's eyes.

[4:09] Shoots it. The cow's brain dead. And they hook some chains to the back hooves. Lift the thing up. Slit its throat. Drain it dry. Now, in that story, you are the cow.

And the devil and the demons is everything else. So we're at war. But at the end of this war, there's a real place called heaven. It's a real war, but there's a real place called heaven.

And it's promised to overcomers. It's not promised to people who haven't overcome. It's always promised to overcomers. To those who are faithful even unto death.

To those who hold fast to the truth. They've overcome loveless, zeal-less religion. They're guarding their hearts. They're remembering their first love.

So heaven is for overcomers. For people to actually participate in this war and win. So how do you put those two things together? The fight now and heaven later.

[5:11] Well, I'd ask you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1, verse 13. 1 Peter 1, verse 13 tells us, How do we put these two...

How should we hold these two truths together? What do they do for each other? 1 Peter 1, verse 13. He's already talked about heaven.

He's already talked about our inheritance that can never spoil or fade. It's kept in heaven for us.

He's already talked about that. He's talked about persevering through all kinds of trials and through all kinds of grief.

And now in verse 13, he's talking about the war. The battle. The battle against evil desires. The battle against unholy living. This war that we are caught up in. And in verse 13, you see three commands.

And as we're going to see in a little bit, the main one is the third one. The main one is the third one. And so Peter says, so in light of your salvation, everything that God has done for you, in light of the trials that you're facing, in light of the perseverance that you need, the persecution that you're going through, he's saying, you're in the middle of the battle.

[6:28] You need to remember, you need to do these three things. And the first one is prepare your minds for action. If you are in a war, you need to prepare your minds for action.

It's literally gird up the loins of your mind. The picture is of a man, an Israelite, grabbing the skirts of his robe and tucking them into his belt so that he can fight, he can run, he can do something to participate in the battle without being tripped up.

He is now ready. So get ready to fight. Get ready to go on the defense. So picture a fencer. You've seen those fencers that do, I don't know, the Olympic fencing, I guess.

How do they get ready? They don't just stand there. They put the sword up. They're on their toes.

Their eyes are fastened on their enemy. They're ready to respond.

They're ready to make a strike. They're ready for action. Now in a fight, what is the alternative to that? What's the opposite of that?

[7:33] Well, you've probably seen it. A guy comes out of nowhere and just decks someone. He's not looking at it. Not looking ready for it. But my junior year in high school, I only saw two fights in high school.

My junior year in high school, I remember I was leaving my English class. It was like 9, 10, 30 in the morning. And I had just walked out the door into the hallway. And all of a sudden, out of nowhere, I saw a guy named Mike jumping through the air with his legs like this, kicking Scott Lewis right in the back.

And down they went and they fought it out. It was really the highlight of the day because not much going on at Argus, I guess. The point was, Scott wasn't ready.

He wasn't ready. He was in a fight and he didn't know it. He was in a fight. He had an enemy and he wasn't ready for it.

And Peter says, don't let that happen to you. Don't be like him. Don't be like that cow that just is brought along and shot right between the eyes, thinking everything is OK.

[8:46] So gird your loins. Prepare your minds for action. Second, Peter says, be self-controlled. Be sober.

It's the opposite of drunkenness. It's the opposite of the whirling head, the confused thinking that you're spinning out of action or out of control. He's talking about composure.

So he's saying, get ready. Get your mind ready for action. And in that, keep your composure. Keep on top of yourself.

Compose yourself. Because one of the most important things in any sort of war or a boxing match is keeping your composure, your ability to keep thinking in the middle of the fight, in the middle of him coming after you.

The great philosopher Mike Tyson said, everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.

[9:55] And so what he's saying there is, it's fine. It's good. You're supposed to plan how you want the fight to go. But the tendency is, you get punched in the face the very first time, and then you don't remember what you're doing.

And then you're a victim. So what does it take to win, to stay in control? It means self-control, being level-headed, even-headed, into the conflict. Not flying from one thing to another.

Not spinning out of control. Not mind racing. Because when we are in that, when we are thrashing, like we've fallen into the water and we can't swim, you know what the greatest danger in that is?

Someone tries to rescue you, and you take them down with you. Wayne Grudem says, Peter uses the same word in chapter 4, verse 7, and 5, verse 8, to encourage spiritual alertness for prayer and for resisting the devil.

He knows how easily Christians can lose their spiritual concentration through mental intoxication with the things of this world.

[11:10] Brothers and sisters, what this is saying is sin can make us lose our minds. It can make us act like drunk people. The prodigal son had to come to his senses.

What does that tell you? Where were his senses before? He wasn't thinking right. He was out of his mind. He wasn't doing anything that made real sense.

And that's what sin does. Sin is like alcohol. Gone too far. And we need to be careful that we realize Peter's not just talking about out-and-out sinful things.

Just things of this world. Things taken out of context. Like worldly things apart from us thinking about God, about eternity, about heaven. And so when we leave heaven and eternity and God out of the picture and we just see these things in front of us, then what do we do?

Well, we drink them and feed on them until they fill our minds and they confuse our thinking. It's legitimate things that we take, that we let take God-like status.

[12:25] And we start saying, I have to have this. I need this. I deserve this. I'm nobody without it.

And so when our good desires or desires for good things get to that place, we are drunk.

And we are dangerous. And you know what you do if you're drunk driving? You're going to hit someone. You're going to plow into somebody. You're not going to make it home. And so what Peter says is, in the middle of this fight, stay sober.

Stay in control. Watch your appetites. Watch your desires. Make sure that they're not running the show. But you're in control. Now the third, and here's the most important thing.

He says, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ appears. That's a longer sentence. Set your hope fully on the grace.

[13:30] So he's saying, set your hope fully on this grace. And it's going to be given to you when Jesus Christ appears. So this is future grace.

He's talking about heaven. He's talking about the very last things. When the world is done, God isn't done doing us good. He has more grace to give us in these final great things, this heaven.

And that's what he's talking about. And so the main verb of all of verse 13 is the word hope. Set your hope. He's saying, hope fully in heaven.

So because this is the main idea of this sentence, it's the main verb. It's telling us how we do the other two things. How do you stay self-controlled?

How do you stay? How do you get your minds ready for action? You put your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. So you set your hope fully on heaven.

[14:34] So how do you keep your good desires from getting out of control and becoming idols in your hearts? Well, you put your hope fully on the grace that God is going to give you when Jesus Christ appears.

Not on things here. See, without heaven in mind, these things are going to grow and inflate and become too big in our heart. But with heaven in our mind and our hope fully set there, that keeps things in check.

It keeps things small where they need to be. And how do you gird up your minds? Well, the Christian soldier, ready for battle, has half a mind in heaven already.

He's thinking about where I'm going. What I'm going to do. What's it going to be like? He's hoping for heaven. He's not hoping for this or that. He has a long-term perspective.

And when you have a long-term perspective, you know that. When you have this long-term hope, that gets you through the ups and downs of the present moment, doesn't it?

[15:37] So if you want to graduate college, that's the goal. Well, you should just say, well, I want to keep pressing on towards that goal. And there's going to be setbacks.

But I've got to keep the goal in mind. I'm not going to throw away the goal when something bad happens. So Peter is saying that without thinking about heaven, without living for heaven, without that hope before you, you are in no condition to fight.

You are a sitting duck in this war. So you're like Scott Lewis walking down the hall just waiting to get kicked. You're like that cow that's just gently getting moved along, ready to be harvested.

And so set your hope fully on the grace to be given you. Now what does it look like to set your hope on something? What does it look like?

Well, we all know what this really is. I'm just going to draw some things out. If you're 14, maybe your great thing that you're setting your hope on is, I guess Reese might be 14, right?

[16:48] I've seen the smile between them. I could get my driver's license. And I'll be able to drive. And the world's my oyster then, right? That's when life is going to get good.

Everyone's laughing, Reese, because obviously they know it's not that good. Or if you're 16, 17, 18, whatever age you are, you want someone to love.

You want a boyfriend or a girlfriend. And you say, if that comes, then my life is going to get better. That's when the good things are going to start happening to me. And if I only had that, then I would be happy.

That's what you do when you set your hope on something. If I only had my driver's license, if I only had a car, then I would be happy. Maybe it's retirement for some of you. I just got to make it through these last couple years of work.

And if I can retire, then life is going to be good. You're setting your hope, your confident expectation for future good. But instead of putting it on something future and heaven, I mean, you put it on something here.

[17:53] We all do that. Well, that's setting your hope on something. And the problem is when you set your hope fully on something, where that's the big thing.

That's the main thing. When you start making those things that I just talked about the main thing, that it's a sure recipe for disappointment, for disillusionment.

And it actually gets you ready to be harvested, to be tempted. Because if you've lived long enough and you've had enough experience, well, I can tell you, I've been through those things.

Got my driver's license. Graduated high school. Had a girlfriend. Graduated college. Got married. Had children. Graduated from seminary.

Had my dream job. And, you know, I've hoped in all those things. But I can tell you, all those things to one degree or another have disappointed me.

[19:02] That's not because of anything in them. It's because what we do with those things, don't we? Those things that are good, we put our hope, we have the tendency to put our hope fully in them.

And we start thinking, that's the end all, and that's the be all. And so it's not the problem with the things themselves. It's what we do with them. We put on them expectations that they can't handle, that they can't carry, that they can't fulfill.

And when we do that, they disappoint us. And then we're disappointed. And then we're disillusioned.

And then we're bitter. And we're resenting God. And we're thinking wrongly about Him. And then, there we are, thinking that God has let us down.

And now we are prime targets. We are ready to be tempted. We're ready to be harvested. We're ready to be the target of all kinds of satanic attacks.

[20:09] Maybe it's going to be out-and-out rebellion. Maybe it's going to just be discouragement, where you just devolve into this depressed, disillusioned, cynical Christian, sullen Christian, just doing your duty.

And when you're in that situation where you have no joy, and you think, really, this is all a bunch of jaded business, then you've been sidelined. You're a casualty.

But you can see the practicalness, the practicality of Peter's words. Heaven isn't like anything in this world. When we set our hope fully there, that's not going to disappoint us.

And when we set our hope fully there, that protects us from being disappointed by all this other stuff. It puts these things into perspective. Heaven won't spoil or fade.

So it's not going to be there, and all of a sudden, we're disillusioned with it. And we can't lose it, because like what we saw last week, God keeps it.

[21:13] It's going to be given to us when Jesus Christ appears. It's in his hands. And so heaven is a safe. It's a sure hope that can weather all the storms of this life that you're going through.

And so when I get into the habit of visualizing myself on a road to heaven, that is a wonderful practice to think, I'm going to live these years, 5, 10, 15, 20 years, and at the end, but I'm on a road that's going to heaven.

So when I start visualizing myself on a road to heaven, and saying to myself, I am going there.

Heaven is a real place. And one day, I'm going to take the big step forward.

And from this life into that life, from a cursed life into everlasting life, when I say that's when life is going to be good, that's when life is going to get good, then I won't put my hope into all the broken things of this world, because I won't need to.

I won't have to. And so heaven protects me. Thinking about heaven protects me. Thinking about heaven gets me ready to fight. Thinking about heaven is how you keep your composure when life is punching you in the face.

[22:32] When you wanted something and you're being disappointed. When life is not turning out how you wanted it to. See, you just can't live a Christian life without heaven in mind.

You just can't do it. You were never meant to live the Christian life in a closed-top car where you're driving along, and there's a piece of steel between you and the sky.

And you can't even see in front of you. It's like you're driving in a steel box. You don't see that the road you are on is taking you to heaven. And you can't see heaven above you. You can't see heaven in front of you.

We were meant to live the Christian life with a clear windshield. The world was saying, I am going somewhere. Heaven is in front of me. I was meant to drive the Christian car.

It's a convertible where there's nothing between me and the sky. Nothing between God is here. I am going up there. We were meant to live with the top down.

[23:34] So let me ask you, are you driving in a steel box where you can't see where you're going?

You can't see what's above you? Or are you driving through life with heaven in front of you, with heaven above you, saying, one day Jesus is going to, just like what we sang, he's going to split the skies open, and there's going to be a trumpet player.

And down he comes. And when he comes, he's bringing my home with me, with him. Are you waiting for that?

Listen to Colossians 3, and then we'll be done. Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ and God. And when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory.

[24:45] So let's live with that hope, with our minds set on him. This week. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I do pray that you would keep us from living this Christian life in a steel, opaque box, that we can't see heaven, and we can't see what's in front of us, and we are alone and isolated.

But help us to see that we were meant to live this Christian life with the top down, with heaven in view, with God above us and near us and with us.

And we were meant to live it with friends. We were meant to march an army together, not isolated and alone, but a holy, happy band marching to Emmanuel's land.

Help us to be that. Let's help us to be looking forward as a group to our eternal home. And I do pray that as we think about heaven, you would prepare us and that you would garrison our hearts, that you would put up a wall around our hearts that keeps us from going off the rails, that keeps us from getting drunk in this world's intoxicating desires and things.

grace. And I do pray for those who have no hope of heaven. Oh Lord, have mercy.

[26:13] Disappoint their every desire and design until you bring them to yourself. We do pray that you would make people miserable until they find joy in Jesus.

that they would not settle for mud pies when you are offering them vacation at the beach. Pray, oh Lord, that you would have mercy on people.

Have mercy on us and keep us from our own wayward hearts. In Jesus' name I do pray. Amen.