

Unleavened Bread and Hope

Hope Inspires Transformation

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For purposes of illustration, let us follow in a summary type fashion two fictional friends named Larry and Harry.

They had normal childhoods. They made fine grades in school. And, when they got to high school they had their mandatory meeting with the guidance counselor. So, they went in and the counselor asked them each a very basic question, "What do you want to do when you finish your education?" Basically, "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

Larry, the athletic one, said that he hoped to be a pro baseball player because his coach had told him that he had talent. He thought he had the potential to make it to the big leagues.

Harry mentioned that his French teacher had noticed that he seemed to have a flair for language—a gift for it. So, he had decided that after one year of French he wanted to teach French, or perhaps become a professional interpreter.

The guidance counselor, then, gave each of them some pointers that they might use in reaching their goals.

Well, the next year there was the mandatory meeting with the guidance counselor, and he asked them what they had done over the past year to help themselves toward their goal.

Larry blushed and hung his head. And said, "I seemed to have lost my fast ball. Every curve ball I throw hangs and gets hammered." He glumly admitted that he had failed to make the junior varsity team.

And the counselor asked him, "What happened?"

And he said, "Oh, I do not know. I guess I did not stay in good enough shape. I can always join my dad in the family business."

The guidance counselor asked the same question of Harry. His reaction was just the opposite of Larry. He got on the edge of his seat, and was really excited. He said, "I decided that if I wanted to be a teacher or interpreter, I would have to immerse myself in French! So, I found a good tutor whom I work with three times a week. I ordered French magazines and books over the internet. And, I even spent two months last summer with a French family in Bordeaux, and I stay in contact with them every couple of weeks by phone.

I met a student over there. We got along very well. He pointed me to a few French language internet radio sites, and I listen to those regularly. Whenever I get a movie, I always put on either the French subtitles, or French language audio. I have already passed my French advanced placement test, so as soon as I get to college, I will skip right into Sophomore French. And, I have even gotten some scholarships from a few universities. This has been a

great year!"

Now, which of these two friends, "Hanging Curve Larry," or "Francophile Harry" will achieve his goals? Which one was motivated to put his all into attaining his ambitions?

Obviously, Harry will go far in his chosen profession, while Larry, unfortunately, will never grace a major, or a minor league baseball field.

Both of them had high hopes for their future, but only one of them saw his hopes realized. What made the difference? Having hopes is well and good. In fact, it is a major virtue of a Christian to have hope. But, are our hopes real enough to us—in our minds—to motivate us to achieve them?

I aim to show you, today, that this is the lesson of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Our hope should be so vivid and so desirable to us that we are motivated to accomplish as much as we can to turn that hope into a reality.

Now, we know that in our Christian experience that it does not all depend upon us. We should know that from the beginning. But, there is a great deal we should and must do. And the more we put into it, the more real *that* hope will be, and the more likely we are to reach it.

We come to I Corinthians 5 probably every Feast of Unleavened Bread because, in this section, Paul explains leaven in terms of what it means for us as Christians. It helps us to be reminded about certain principles inherent in this Feast of Unleavened Bread.

So, we will read three verses, here, 6 through 8. Paul writes to them because they had a very heinous sin in the church. I should explain, too, that this was a heinous sin, but they were almost proud of it, and had coddled it, rather than thrown the people out who were causing a division within the church of God. He says:

I Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying *is* not good. [They thought they were being so loving and patting themselves on the back for being so spiritual.] Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

He is saying that this sin may seem to affect only one or two people in the church, but you do not seem to be aware that when sin infests a church, it is going to infect everyone! If it has not already, it will soon! So, he brings out this principle, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump."

In conclusion Paul says:

I Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

We are unleavened due to what Christ did. And when these sins pop up, he says that we need to get rid of them. In essence, this is the lesson of the foot washing. We have been cleaned, and occasionally in walking about, we get our feet dirty and must be cleaned up again. But we are clean. We are unleavened, but once in a while something happens, and that leaven must be

purged once again. And Christ is the way that this happens. Christ's blood covers us of all sins.

I Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast [Feast of Unleavened Bread], not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

So, he talks here about purging the old leaven. And he talks, then, about replacing the old leaven with what he calls "unleavened." Actually, if you have the King James, or the New King James Bibles, which uses italics for words which are not actually in the original text, you will notice that the word bread, here, is italicized; that means that Paul never wrote that word there. Paul just wrote the word 'unleavened.' But, it is assumed that he meant unleavened bread.

So leaven is, of course, a type of corruption and sin, which like yeast in dough grows in that nutrient rich environment and expands or puffs the dough up so that we get nice soft loaves of bread (bread which we have not enjoyed, now, for an entire week).

And Paul equates leaven with malice and wickedness—corruption! Sin! And those things need to be purged, cleaned, and gotten rid of to the greatest extent we can. But, even if we do this, he implies that our work is not done. Just getting rid of the corruption is not enough.

The leaven-free lump (which cannot happen in nature; only heat stops the leavening process)—us in the spiritual sense—must be replenished with what I call "anti-leaven." It is just the opposite of leaven. It must be as good and pure as leaven is bad and corrupting. Paul calls it, "the unleavened [bread] of sincerity and truth"—the anti-leaven!

So, that is very easy to see.

We will use what is found in Matthew 12: 43-45 as an analogy for what happens in terms of purging self of leaven.

Matthew 12:43-45 When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

Like I said, we will use this as an analogy of the process. Once we remove the sin through grace, and the mercy of our forgiving God and Father, we have an empty, swept and ordered mind.

Now, this empty, swept and ordered mind—our heart—must be filled with something. Otherwise, if it is not filled with something to replenish what has been swept out, then what has been swept out will sweep right back in, and—Jesus makes this very clear—that last state is worse than the former state. And, it is going to be far worse afterward than before.

The dog has returned to his vomit, as Peter has so picturesquely said in one of his epistles.

So, God wants it to be filled with good things—Godly things. And he calls it, as we saw there in I Corinthians 5, sincerity which covers the attitudes that a person has. He wants pure attitudes. He wants us to have a good outlook on things—a Godly outlook, a righteous outlook, and to be positively working toward His goals. And he also calls it truth.

He gives us this idea that we are not supposed to just sit there and be bumps on a log, but we are to fill that void with God's true knowledge. And if we do not we are going to end up falling right back into corruption.

Now, have you ever left a lump of unleavened dough on your kitchen counter? Do you know what happens when you do that? The wild, natural yeast spores in the air—they are everywhere just as sin is everywhere—falls onto, or lands on your lump of nutrient rich dough. For that yeast spore, this is the "mother lode." So, it lands there, and before you know it, you have leavened bread dough, because that yeast multiplies quickly, and grows through the dough, and it will eventually rise as if you had put the leavening in the dough to begin with.

Bread companies have labs that purify the strains of yeast for better nutrition, and quicker action, and lack of potential detrimental attributes; as well as specific strains suited for sour-dough, and other bread and flour types.

So, if all we do is work on ridding ourselves of sin, and let ourselves (figuratively) "sit on the counter" for a time without replacing it with goodness, we will end up back in sin. That is the principle here.

If you are not moving forward, you are actually sliding backward. If you are not replacing what has been taken out with something good, then you are actually allowing yourself to become re-corrupted.

So, there are these two sides. There is the purging, and the replacement with good.

So, the question may come to mind, "What motivates a person to purge sin, and to add goodness?" What is the fire under you to make you do both of these things? Why would anyone sacrifice all the pleasures of sin to fight against the pulls of human nature, and actually increase in Godly character? What would make a person do this?

Now, if we would go back to I Corinthians 5, we would see that the inspiration that Paul gives to the people is that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. He gives them a motivation which we could call, "The motivation of a historical act." Something that Christ has done for us. It is a certainty. It is done. It is past. And, it can be applied to us now.

My emphasis, today, is on our motivation due to a future reality. Not just something that has been done in the past, but something that is before us that acts like a carrot, getting us motivated, and following after it—pursuing it.

Now, we can see this happening in type in the Exodus Narrative. And if you remember your chapters, Exodus 3: 7-10 is where God called Moses.

Exodus 3: 7-10 And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression

of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

By this time Exodus 4: 29 occurs, Moses had taken leave of his father-in-law, and had started back to Egypt, and Aaron had met him on the way.

Exodus 4: 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.

You may remember that he had given him the rod to cast down; it turned into a snake. He told him to put his hand into his shirt and it would come out leprous, and to put it back in again and it would come out clean.

He gave them His signs and His Name to prove to Israel who had sent him. He had been given the power to do this; their delivery was going to happen.

Exodus 4: 31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

This was great news! God had heard their cry! He would release them soon from bondage! And not only that, he would lead them to their own land! And not just any land—this was the land of Canaan, the land promised to Jacob and their forefathers. It was a fertile land that would have everything that they would need. It was just the right size for them; it had everything that they lacked in Egypt. What a wonderful goal they had! God had set up a hope for them. And, in this case, the Israelites' response was wonderful. And then they worshipped God. They were really enthused by this wonderful news and promise from God. They saw the signs. "Wow! This is going to happen! This is great!"

So, when Moses gave them the news, their reaction was to give God thanks and reverence. "They bowed their heads, and worshipped."

Their hope prompted them to worship. They had this hope that they were going to be freed, and they were going to become rich and live in plenty; their lives would be so much better and different.

Well, this is not the end of the story, however.

If we go over one chapter to Exodus 5: 22—you see, in the meantime, between the end of chapter 4, and the end of chapter 5, Moses and Aaron had gone to see Pharaoh, and he answered them, *"What? Who do you think you are? Get back to work. And, since you seem to have extra time to go off into the desert and worship your God, then you get your own straw, and keep the same quota of brick daily"* And it said that the taskmasters oppressed the Israelites even further.

Exodus 5:22-6:4 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why *is* it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For [because] with a strong hand he will let them go, and with [because of] a strong hand he will drive them out of this land." And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "*I am* the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by* My name LORD [Yahweh] I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers.

What He is doing here is He is establishing His credentials again with Moses; He is giving him a background of His dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and showing him that these promises made to Israel in Egypt are just the culmination of a larger promise that He had made to them. This is something that He has been working on for generations! It was something that Moses could hang onto. This was not something that was going to happen overnight if God had been working on this for over 400 years. You just cannot expect Him to snap His fingers and everything be done. This is going to take a while, and it is going to be a process; He is going to show Pharaoh His strong arm, and things are going to get done.

Do you see what He is trying to do here? He is establishing to Moses that this is going to take a while, but you can rest assured that because He had given His promise and because He is both God Almighty and the Ever-Living One, this is going to happen!

Exodus 6:5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.

"This is something I have not forgotten. I am working on it!"

Exodus 6:6 Therefore say to the children of Israel: `I *am* the LORD;

Now, listen to all these statements of positive affirmation of what He is going to do:

Exodus 6:6-8 *I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD."*

Wow! Sentence after sentence of God nailing Himself down about what He is going to do! "*I will do this, and I will do that, I will do this other thing, and I will do this thing too...*" And, all these things will be done because He is God Almighty; because He is Yahweh, the Eternal One; and because He established His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He remembered it. He is not going to fail. He is faithful.

Exodus 6:9 *So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.*

Where was their hope, now? It had not been long since they were falling on their knees, bowing their heads and worshipping.

But now, after the tables seemed to have been turned, and the screws tightened down a bit more, they were turning their backs on Moses. They would not listen to him. "*Yeah Moses. We got work to do...*"

All this stirring and heartening revelation from God would not move them at all. They were so despondent that they would not even listen.

Now, this phrase, "anguish of spirit," is interesting. Maybe your margin has this note. It means "short spirited." What this suggests is that their hopes were dashed, not necessarily through the oppression from the Egyptians (though, obviously a part of it), but it was due to their own impatience. They had a very short spirit; they could only keep their motivation going for only so long. Then, they would get impatient, and were back to being in the dumps, overwhelmed by their bondage.

You see, what they saw was God's promise as a little bitty speck on the horizon; and they saw their oppression by the Egyptians as this huge gorilla with a big mallet.

What was more real to them was the gorilla with the big mallet, not the promised land—the itty bitty speck—in the distance. That wonderful possibility.

Now, we have to remember that real hope is *confident enduring expectation*. It is a hope that is willing to wait, and even suffer until the expectation becomes a reality. It sees that far off speck as a greater size, ultimately, than the big gorilla standing next to you. And, it is willing

to take what the gorilla will dish out in order to achieve that future reality.

It is not a probability. It is more than a possibility. It is a reality. It is already there. We are just waiting to reach it, patiently and eagerly.

Now, what we see here in Exodus 3, 4, 5, and 6, is a large scale version of this principle. God presented them with a wonderful hope. In a way, we can say that He gave them a new lease on life. He opened their minds to a vision of something wonderful. And, had they really thought it through, because of Who He is, it should have been a reality!

Right away, immediately, they appreciated it! Obviously, their reaction was good. They bowed their heads and worshipped. But, because they did nothing to fill the void in their lives—continuing to act and think like Egyptian slaves, rather than soon-to-be-freed children of God—they made no real change in their mind.

They reacted, yes; that was good. But, they really did not fill their minds and hearts with the fact that God was their God, and that He had a plan for them, and that they needed to do certain things to get on board with Him to bring about the reality.

So, in this case, their response to God was to cover their ears and turn their backs when the going got tough. In a short while, whether days or weeks, their attitudes went from thankful worship to sullen rejection.

I could have chosen any number of illustrations from a whole series of incidents occurring between Moses' calling and entrance into the Promised Land. They did this time, and time again.

God would do something absolutely wonderful for them. He might appear in the cloud, or the pillar of fire. He would do a great miracle like opening the Red Sea, or rain down manna upon them. Or He would open a fissure in the earth, and water would come out for those 2 or 3 million, and all their cattle. He would defeat an army for them. This, that, and the other thing He did for them. It was nothing for God to do these things.

And they would think, "Wow! God can provide quail!" (Or whatever it happened to be.)

But, within a short time, they would be back to rebellion against Him. They would be discontent and stubborn, wanting to kill Moses, and figuratively return to Egypt.

All the while, though, the promise of entry into the promised land remained. God would even remind them that He would take them to a land flowing with milk and honey. But, they did not seem to realize how wonderful it was. At least, they did not realize it enough to make them change. It was not motivating enough.

They never took the opportunity to replace their slave mentality. We can call this slave mentality: "The leaven of Egypt." God purged it. He took them right out of the land. They were no more in Egypt. It was gone.

They were out of it. But, it never left them. They did not replace it with the righteousness, sincerity, and truth of the anti-leaven God was willing to give them.

He revealed a great deal through Moses. But, they never latched onto it. They always thought Egypt was more real than the promised land.

Remember, they would say, "*Oh! Remember those leeks we had in Egypt? Were they not good?*" And Moses would say, "*Milk and honey! Milk and honey!*" But, it would not be long before they were back thinking about the flesh pots of Egypt. Egypt and their past were bigger than their future—the promised land under God.

Hebrews, chapter 3 gives a comparison of Moses and Christ. Paul is basically telling us that the Christ was so much greater than Moses. Moses is a huge figure in history, especially Jewish history. But, Paul says, "*As much respect as we give to Moses, we should be giving even greater respect and reverence to Christ because Moses was simply a servant. But, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. A son will inherit the house. The Son is going to be in control, whereas the servant will always be a servant. And so, Christ, therefore, is superior to Moses*"

Hebrews 3:5 And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all His [God's] house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*,

Now, this is interesting. What he is saying here is that what Moses taught in the Pentateuch (and this can be expanded out to cover the whole Old Testament using Moses as kind of key figure) as a witness of, or a forerunner of what was going to be taught by Jesus Christ and the New Testament.

So, what he is saying here is very similar to Romans 15: 4 or I Corinthians 10: 11 where they say that the things that happened back there were examples to us for us to learn from and have comfort and hope by. And, he is using it here, not only for that purpose, but also to give himself backing and proof for what he is about to say.

And what he is about to say is that we have to guard against the danger of falling away—a falling by the wayside before we reach God's Kingdom. Because, what he is going to do is reach back into the Exodus account, and he is going to show that all those people who left Egypt died in the wilderness.

God had given them this wonderful hope. He described it in detail. He told them how He was going to do it. But, every one of them, save for Joshua and Caleb, failed to reach it. As he says very picturesquely, "Their bodies were strewn across the wilderness in 40 years time. It seemed that all the Israelites did was bury their dead; 20,000 might die in this plague and 30,000 in that plague. They scattered their bones all over the wilderness.

So, he is saying, "*Look! We have got to see this example back in the Old Testament as a type—a testimony, a witness, a forerunner—of what could happen to us if we follow the same path they took*"

And so he goes through the rest of chapter 3 and on into chapter 4 showing why they did not make it into the promised land, which he calls, "God's rest."

Hebrews 3:5-6 And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house

we are [the main point] *IF* we hold fast the confidence [implying our faith] and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

So, what he does is stick faith and hope together. And, he says that if we want to make it into God's kingdom—God's rest—we have got to continue in faith, hope, confidence, and rejoicing in the hope. They have got to be firm, enduring, or strong to the end. It has got to be something big enough, great enough, real enough, and vivid enough to carry us all the way through, because, frankly, the Christian life is difficult at times. Not always. But, just going through all the normal ups and downs of life Christianity can be hard to adhere to. If we have confident faith, and enduring hope, we can get over those rough spots. That is what he is getting at here.

Now, Colossians 1:23 says very much the same thing.

Colossians 1:21-23 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled [He is talking about the fact that we have been purged from those things because of Christ's work.] in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight [But, notice this caveat:] if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,

So, here we once again put together continuing in the faith—a faith grounded, steadfast, strong, and unmovable—as well as continuing in the hope of the gospel. And, what was the hope of the gospel? "Jesus Christ came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." We are not looking for the promised land—that area in the Middle East—but we are looking for God's kingdom which will rule over all the earth.

This is an even bigger hope than what Israel had to look forward to. They only had a small patch of land. God promises, now, the earth and the heavens! And, rulership over it all! How real is that to us? How vivid is that goal? Those are questions we have to ask ourselves.

So we have, here, faith and hope—guarantors of our ultimate entrance into God's kingdom. Obviously, God is the guarantor of it, but our faith and our hope are in Him. And if we maintain this faith and hope—if we continue in it, if we are grounded and we are steadfast; and we are confident and enduring in our hope—then a way will be made for us to enter in.

You know, we talk a great deal about faith, and I am sure that in terms of it in comparison to hope, it is probably the more important, but we should not just kick hope aside. Hope is the motivator in all of this.

Our faith can actually lag if it is not complemented with the hope that what we are doing in exercising our faith will payoff in the end. Then, we are doing it for the right reasons. We are actually living in faith because of what God has promised.

Now, for most of us there has to be a great goal and a reward to motivate us to continue to do anything. We are selfish creatures. We ask, "What is in it for us?" And, God has provided the *ultimate* in "what is in it for us!"

Not to be selfish in all of this—I do not want to think of it in this way—I do not want you to think of it this way. To God, it is not a selfish goal. It is the best thing that could ever be! What could be better than God and His creation living forever together in peace, unity, and harmony? That is not a selfish goal. It may seem selfish from the outside, but it is just as selfish as wanting to go on a vacation with your family; or whatever it might be. The idea is being together in a great, wonderful relationship.

It is just as selfish as wanting to be married someday, and have children, and having a close, loving family. And, that is exactly what the kingdom of God is! Jesus Christ will be the Husband, the church of God is the Wife, God is the loving Father; and He is looking forward to having billions and billions of children in close relationships with Him. That is what the Kingdom of God is!

And because God, who owns everything, he adds on all these other benefits—rulership, prosperity, the best that the earth can produce. All those things are ancillary to the fact that God wants to share time and eternity with us. He wants to share experiences with us. He wants to teach us everything He knows. He wants to help us to grow and become as much like Him as any future Spirit Being can learn and do.

That is the hope that lies before us, this wonderful reward.

We really cannot compare it to anything on earth. You can try to compare it to a gem, or a gold mine, or something you would enjoy having of great value. Martin and I were talking yesterday about yachts, and the newest designs. They really looked neat. They cost millions of dollars, but that is the sort of thing that would be neat to have. But to God... a yacht? He could make that in a second!

But a relationship with God? Ah! That is another thing. And, a relationship where both minds are linked and in agreement forever in everything—that is something to look forward to! So, that is the goal. That can maintain us and actually give strength to our faith.

Now, in the remainder of Hebrews 3, Paul focuses on primarily on faith. If we were to go through it, he talks about departing from the living God, lacking faith, the deceitfulness of sin; and our confidence being steadfast. We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief, which is one way to define faithlessness.

Even though God made the promise of entering His rest, to the Israelites—let us say, a scaled down version of what He has promised to us as our hope—they never really latched on to it. And, despite all the miracles that would prove His faithfulness to them or any outside observer observing objectively, they would say, *"Wow! That God just went way out of His way to give them the proofs they needed to show He was on their side, even though He had very high standards which they did not want to live up to. But God sure made no bones about the fact that He was going to get them there, and do everything needed"*

Like we saw in recent sermons and sermonettes, it was a big undertaking. But, He did it. He supplied everything.

And, how much effort did Israel have to actually put into it other than packing their things and

walking out? That is basically all they did through the wilderness. They packed their things. They walked. They unpacked their things. They would camp for a while. And they complained. That was about their entire life after leaving Egypt.

But, what did God do? Miracle after miracle after miracle every day for 40 years—water, and food in the wilderness; plus chasing off all their enemies, plus giving them all their instructions through Moses. God did one thing after another for them.

Still, they, even though they had really very little to do in the grand scheme of things, never signed on. They never really joined His side. They were all out for themselves.

Look at this in a business sense: Let us say that some business executive has a really excellent idea for a new venture. And, he says that he is willing to put up everything that he owns—all his personal money, as well as the company's money—and get the very best people involved in it. It is a wonderful thing.

It is going to make the investors millions of dollars so that they will be as rich as Bill Gates. And he can prove it all. This plan will go from A, to B, to C. The company will throw everything into it, and will come up with a way to make money while making lives better; everything will go well. They have the power, and money to bring this project to fruition.

The Israelites are the investors in this scenario. They say, "Oh, I do not know...this looks good on paper, but, you know, things always come up...you know, there are the Amalekites out there. They are willing to sabotage anything that we do...and I really wonder, this has gone on for 7 or 8 years now, and God has given us manna, water, and shade in the wilderness, and my clothes are still good, and my shoes have no wear on them...but I do not think that He can keep this up...things just do not add up here..."

So, they are like the investors who—although there is overwhelming evidence of the venture's merits and the abilities of the chief executive officer to bring it to completion—say that they are committed to the project, but never sign the papers. They never invest a penny of their money. They never really join in.

They say, "Well, go on if you want to...I will keep watching, and if it looks like it will take off, I will get on." But, they never did get on. They always just waited and complained, and finally ended up dying before they could invest.

We will see that unlike those Israelites who would not invest in God's venture, we have no need to doubt at all. We will see that God goes to even greater lengths with us than He did with Israel.

Hebrews 6:13-16 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation/s for them an end of all dispute.

Meaning, if a man gives an oath, then that should be his bond. His word is His bond; it is going

to happen. They are bound to that.

Hebrews 6:17-20 Thus 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 [God's promise, and His oath], in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation [comfort and encouragement], who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*. This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil, where the Forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

So, you see here, we have no reason to doubt what God has promised. Not only did He make the promise that He made to Israel—he basically told them what He was going to do. Then, He confirmed it by an oath. We know that God cannot lie. It is part of His character. Jesus said that He is the truth. God is the truth too. He cannot lie. If He tells you something it is going to happen.

You could go back to Isaiah and see where if He says something, it is going to accomplish what He had sent it out to do. He is the One who has the ability to say something in generations past and bring it to pass hundreds or thousands of years later. He is the eternal God. What other Being could do that?

God has the power to back all those things up, to manipulate events, to work things out and make it all happen right on time because He is God.

So, even though He added His own oath, which was totally unnecessary, He did it in order to give us comfort, to give us consolation, to assure us—doing a human thing [giving an oath] in order to assure we humans that it was going to come to pass. Because He said there in verse 16, "If a man gives an oath, it is, then, beyond dispute." And so, God decided, "*Okay, I have given my word, but I will give an oath, also, to satisfy their human nature that such a thing is going to happen.*"

So, He gave us these two immutable things so that we do not need to worry or doubt that He is faithful, and that He will bring what He said to pass. Paul says, there in verse 18, that He did this for us so that we could have strong consolation "who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us."

Is that not what we did? Is that not what Israel did?

What He says here in this metaphor is that He threw out a life preserver, like one which hangs from the side of a boat or ship. And He threw it out and we grabbed hold of it and are hanging on for dear life. And, He said that the other end of the rope is anchored in the Holy of Holies in heaven. And, the only way that rope got there is because Jesus Christ went through the veil by His blood and is able now, sitting at the right hand of God as our High Priest, to start reeling that rope back in.

And, it is our hope that ultimately we are going to be reeled right through the veil to sit with

the Father to sit on His throne like Jesus Christ did. That is the hope that we have grasped hold of and cling to with all of our being.

Now, if that was the case, and it is the case, what are we doing about it? Are we allowing it to slip through our fingers, allowing our grip to loosen? How often do we have to cry out to God, "Hey! Throw it back! I have lost it! I do not have a strong enough grip!"

But, if we have hope, it will strengthen our faith and strengthen our grip—it will stay tight. And, Jesus and God the Father will continue to reel us in. And, that is a sure hope because They do not let go! If anybody is going to let go, it would be us. And, that is why we need to have the reality before us—there is a wonderful future before us and it is sure if we would just hang on.

I recently heard of an experiment done on a rat. Experiments are done on rats every day. But, this one was interesting. The rat was taken from its cage, and placed in a large stainless steel vat filled with water. It was smooth so that it could not get a hold and climb out. It was to be stuck in there. The scientist, as soon as he dumped the rat in this vat of water, started a timer. He just watched and observed the rat as it swam and struggled in the water.

It treaded water for one hour...two hours. And, about the third hour it began to show signs of stress and began to drown. So the scientist reached in and rescued the rat, dried him off, fed him (he did not need any water), and put him back in his cage.

A couple of days later, the scientist took the same rat, and put him into the same vat of water, and started the timer. And he waited. And he waited. And he waited two hours, three hours, five hours, ten hours, fifteen hours, twenty hours...a full day! (I am sure the scientist had help!) That rat swam, struggled, and treaded water for 30 hours before it began to exhibit the same signs of distress and drowning that it had just days before at three hours.

Now, what was the difference between the two different experiments/days? The scientist rescued the rat! It had a hope because it had happened once before, and it remembered that if it would just keep struggling, the scientist would rescue him again. It hung on in that water for ten times longer than it had the first time when it had no hope.

Do you see what hope can do? Hope can give us strength to keep treading, to keep swimming, to keep our heads out of the water.

I want to remind you again of the hope.

Ephesians 1:15-16 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:...

That is encouraging too. He commended them for their faith and their love; and they knew that they would have his prayers going up to heaven for them. Very encouraging!

And, this is what he said his prayers entail:

Ephesians 1:17 ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the

knowledge of Him,

Remember, we are supposed to be filled with sincerity and truth. So, he asks God to give them the truth, the knowledge, and wisdom of the revelation. He also asks that:

Ephesians 1:18-23 ...the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know [Now listen: He asks this specifically for them:] that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

That is our hope! The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the Saints. I almost get the impression that Paul was not able to think of truly amazing enough words to express the glory, the greatness, and the power of our inheritance.

So, he says, "*I know this is going to be, because this is what happened to Jesus Christ. And God had the power to take Him from the dead, out of the grave, raise Him up as a Spirit Being, returning His great glory to Him that He had before the world began, placing Him right beside the Father on His throne. And now, look at what He has! He rules everything under God the Father. He is far above all principality and power. And do you know that this Wonderful One whom God did this to is now our Head? Do you realize*" Paul is saying, "*what we have got going for us? Would we just realize this? What strength we will have to endure what may be coming!*"

Christ is the Forerunner. That means that there are others following behind. And the "they" are us! These things will happen to us, too, if we continue grounded and steadfast in the faith, and rejoice for the hope set before us.

It is really amazing what John wrote here.

I John 2:28 And now, little children [Listen to this!], abide in Him,

Continue in Him. Live in Him. He is saying the same thing Paul said in Colossians 1:23, and the same thing he said in Hebrews 3:5-6.

I John 2:28-29 ...that when He appears [the time when we will be changed], we may have confidence [the hope again] and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Take this knowledge and understanding to the bank! We know that God is righteous. And we know that it is our job to be like Him. So, if you know this, we can be sure that if we continue to practice righteousness, we will be changed. We will be born into His family.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be.

We still have only an inkling of an idea of what we will be, what we will be doing. God gives us what we can understand now, but the reality is far, far greater than our puny minds can really imagine.

I John 3:2 ...and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know [listen to the confidence] that when He is revealed [meaning Jesus Christ] we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Remember it says in the Old Testament that if you looked upon God, you died. Moses, as great as he was, could only see His back side, otherwise he could not live. He would have died. But, John says that when Jesus Christ is revealed we are going to be like Him, and we are going to see Him in His absolute glory—something that would kill a mere mortal.

What a wonderful thing it is that this will happen—that we have this hope of being just like the glorified Jesus Christ.

I John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

That is a big burden to put on a person's shoulders—to become as pure as Jesus Christ. But, because we have such a great hope, His burden is light. Does He not say that? This is something that we should leap into with joy knowing the great hope that is set before us.

So, what should this glorious hope inspire us to do? It should inspire us to become transformed into the image of Jesus Christ through practicing righteousness as mentioned in 2:29, and purifying ourselves.

Do you know what those two things are? Purifying ourselves is purging us of sin. And practicing righteousness is filling ourselves with sincerity and truth—eating the unleavened. If we cleanse ourselves of sin, and put on righteousness, we will be born into the Family of God.