

## “A New Hope”

**Psalm 13; Ephesians 4:17-24**

September 8, 2024

### Introduction

- This week I did something that always reminds me how dear this church is to me.
  - o Upon arriving here, I took out my home keys to open the door.
  - o And, upon arriving home, I took out my church key to open the door.
    - It shows me that, in my mind at least, both places are like a home to me.
- And it struck me as odd for the first time in a while.
  - o Odd that, after a misspent youth and young adulthood, that church would be considered to be a second home to me now.
    - Now remember, I wasn't always a pastor.
    - Didn't always try to line up my life with what God would want me to do, no far from that.
- And yet, here I am, thanks be to God.
  - o Here, on a Sunday morning, I stand in the irrepressible light of Jesus Christ, looking forward to another week of being a disciple of Christ.
- But it wasn't always like that.
  - o To use language from Paul, I definitely reveled in the futility of mind for years, honestly.
- Thankfully, by God's grace, I was changed.
- But when I run into passages like this, I really remember the past and I hope you do to.
  - o The point Paul is trying to make is very clear, **DO NOT GO BACK TO THE PAST.**
    - Do not walk in the futility of your mind like unbelievers do.

### Ephesians

- Paul writes to the churches at Ephesus with a great deal of love.
- As we learned hopefully in our time studying Acts, Paul came to and preached in Ephesus and planted churches in the region.
  - o Remember, Ephesus was where a huge cult of Artemis was that was deeply invested in the silver trade.
    - Paul's evangelism upsets that trade, causing a riot.
    - Paul flees but the churches he planted continued to thrive, even in his absence.
- So, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus.
  - o The first three chapters are intensely theological.
    - In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul focuses on laying a theological foundation for believers. He begins by emphasizing the spiritual blessings found in Christ, explaining how God chose and adopted believers before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-14). Paul then prays for their spiritual growth and understanding (1:15-23). In chapter 2, Paul reminds them of their past condition of spiritual death and how they were made alive by grace through faith, not by works (2:1-10). He also highlights the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, breaking down barriers to form one body (2:11-22). In chapter 3, Paul reveals the mystery of the Gospel—that Gentiles are now fellow heirs—and prays for their empowerment and comprehension of God's love (3:1-21).
      - As I said, the first three chapters of Ephesians are as deeply theological as Romans to be sure.
        - o In this theological explication of what God has done in Christ, Paul is effusive about the love God has for his people and the ways that he has cared for them through the ministry of the Gospel.
- Then, in Chapters 4-6, the turn is to practice.
  - o How do you live as a Christian?

### Orthodoxy versus Orthopraxy

- There's a great divide in the center of Christian faith oftentimes between people.
- There are those who think that the Christian faith is all about what you know.

- Do you know the Bible?
- Do you know the theology of the Church?
- Do you know Jesus Christ personally?
  - These tend to be the dominant ways some people conceive of their faith.
    - That they KNOW a lot.
      - And don't get me wrong, there is much good to be had from knowing a lot.
        - But knowing a lot isn't the totality of being a Christian.
- On the other side of the coin, there are people who think it is all about what you are doing:
  - How are you serving Jesus through His people?
  - What are you accomplishing for the kingdom?
  - How are you making Jesus Christ known in the world?
    - These are the significant questions of another side of belief.
- I want to tell you about the most amazing thing I ever saw.
  - I saw a blind kid win a game of three-on-three basketball.
    - It was the most amazing thing ever. They ran set plays with the blind kid getting all sorts of screens to get open shots which he drained.
      - The kid just decided he was going to do it.
      - Believe the Gospels, that anything was possible for those who believed.
        - And he made it happen.
- But that feat took two things.
  - Both the knowledge of how to play basketball.
  - The ability to actually shoot the ball.
- Just like that amazing feat that kid did, so too do we need to have both knowledge of our faith as well as the practice of our faith.
  - It's kind of like a tree where the roots that go deep into the ground is our knowledge and the fruit we produce is the praxis.

Since Christianity isn't just about what we know, Paul is very focused on how we live.

Paul's point – We're not to backslide.

Backsliding

- That's a term my Methodist friends taught me, I don't know whether the origin is there or elsewhere but it's a good word to have.
- Backsliding is the idea is that our sinful natures make it natural for us to return to our old patterns of living.
  - New life disrupts us, changes us but some parts of us still long for the past and so we acquiesce over time to the same sins.
    - The seven deadliest returns to our lives.
      - Paul wants us to be on the lookout for when that happens.
- First of all, it helps to know that the Christian belief is that we are created to serve God and that, as we are doing it, we are the most content because we are most aligned with our original intent in creation.
  - To backslide might feel good for the short run, but, believe me, it's not where we want to be.
  - In fact, Paul calls it living in the futility of the mind.
- What does Paul mean by futility of the mind in Ephesians 4?
  - In Ephesians 4:17, when Paul talks about the "futility of the mind," he is referring to the emptiness and uselessness of thinking that is disconnected from God's truth. This "futility" describes a way of thinking that leads nowhere, focused on worldly or selfish concerns without acknowledging God. It results in a mind darkened in understanding, hardened to spiritual truths, and unable to comprehend or embrace the life God offers. Essentially, Paul is warning believers not to live like the Gentiles who are trapped in meaningless and spiritually dead patterns of thought.

- Imagine someone who is constantly chasing after material success and personal achievements, believing that the next promotion, car, or house will bring lasting happiness. They pour all their energy into work, accumulating possessions, and social status, yet they always feel empty inside. Despite reaching their goals, they remain unsatisfied, restless, and disconnected from a deeper purpose. This person might dismiss spiritual matters as irrelevant or unimportant, focusing only on temporary gains. In the end, their pursuit feels futile because it lacks any connection to the greater meaning of life that comes from knowing God.
  - Paul wants us to know that living in the futility of our minds is the only outcome detached from God.
    - We are created by God, designed to glorify God in God's universe. To reject God is to untether ourselves from reality itself and live a futile life.
      - Frustration is the defining feeling of a futile life.
- When we return to former things, we run the risk of living a futile life.

#### Avoiding a Futile life

- Go back to the original thing.
  - You need knowledge.
  - You need actions.
- Knowledge
  - Get in a small group Bible study of some variety.
    - This could be Sunday school here or the class at night, either way, be involved in learning.
      - The best way to avoid falling into the futility of our minds is through our active study of God's Word.
        - By refreshing your mind with God's Word, you avoid the pitfalls of secular life for the most part.
          - You know the Way and you stay on it.
    - Read the Bible daily.
      - This isn't as hard as it sounds.
        - Read a Psalm a day. Even the longest psalms will not take you more than 8 minutes to read.
    - Seek out devotionals and other ways to expand your faith.
  - Practice
    - Take on a ministry assignment.
      - Talk to Denise about serving in the church.
      - Talk to Freddie about serving outside the church.

#### Rice Cooker story

- Once, when I was in Divinity School, a group of my friends and I were going to make some gumbo.
- We went to the target and got all the ingredients, looking forward to our feast.
  - But it was while we were driving home, one of the young women realized that her rice cooker was back in Texas.
    - Alas, the girls conceded, we could not have gumbo.
- I asked them did they have a pot?
  - They answered yes.
- I then asked them, did they have water?
  - They answered yes.
- Then the good news was that we would have rice.
- If you have a Bible and have the ability to serve others, you have everything necessary to live an abundant life now leading to an eternal one in Christ.