

“Hope: Putting our Trust in God”
 Pastor Sam Richards
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 Texts: Psalm 42:5; Romans 1:16, 12:2

Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance-His face, His smile.

*What I love is bearing **hope** to jail, bearing the smile of God in to those who are hope-less!* . Last Wednesday I set about preparation for jail church with two messages: one on reasonable holiness and the other on memory and sin. But Sue and I never know what awaits us the other side of the door. The last service had been rambunctious. Seven despondent ladies came and they all vied with each other for the mike. Many of them wanted to talk about their stuff which is not exactly what church is for. And after the women, we waited quite a while and two hopeless men came down. I remember speaking on blessed assurance because the Sunday message often forms the backdrop for what I present on. The second meeting was pretty wild, too. Each service ended with someone coming up and expressing interest in coming to our church when they were liberated. I thank them for their interest and said quite a few people express that feeling but very few end up following up with a visit. Be that as it may.

But this week, Sue was feeling somewhat discouraged, I think, but I had a feeling that something big was about to happen—or, at least something bigger. And sure enough, nine women came and a whole pod of seven men came to the second service. Sue and I were there ministering until 9:45—lights out are at 10:30. Both services were powerful and that experience is what I want to share with you. When I spoke to the impact that sin has on our memory function, which is the message I brought to the ladies. We explored how sin distorts, or disfigures memory. First sin causes us to forget things we ought to remember (the things that God has done for us, his intervention in our lives, the infusion of his grace, love, forgiveness and power so as to save us) and, on the other hand, sin causes us to remember things that we ought to have forgotten. Once we have repented, confessed our sin to Jesus and asked forgiveness for our trespasses, those transgressions are taken from us, removed as far as the east is from the west because they are no longer active complaints against us. They are forgiven, cancelled—taken from the active pile and placed in the inactive, or in the pile of what has been dealt with and put away from us. What a wonderful release accompanies this cancellation of debt, or sin removal—our bondage to them is broken and we are no longer shackled to our sin as we were before we put them under the blood for purification, cleansing and forgiveness. Similarly, the people we have forgiven who sinned against us, are cancelled/released. Those we sinned against, we hope, have similarly released us as we are truly sorrowful and repentant for harming, hurting, failing or troubling them.

We had two digressions, memorable ones, that I remember. The first one was what I consider a test to see if I could be derailed from talking about the damage sin causes memory. “Do homosexuals go to heaven?” Respectfully, I said, “That’s a little off topic. But because it comes up often, I will say this. With regard to my preaching of the gospel I am indifferent to matters of sexuality whether homosexual or straight. And here’s the reason, I am concerned about the souls, about where souls are going to spend eternity. I believe that everyone has a soul, and everyone has a destiny and my heart is that no one would spend eternity in torment, in flames of endless punishment and because I believe that hell is a real destination, it is my job to try insure that none of you end up there—regardless of your sexuality, your gender identity whatever you might imagine that to be. Sadly some of those who disbelieve in hell are going to end up there

through their own ignorance, folly and choice—what they believe about hell won't ultimately matter. Whether or not that's "fair" is a different matter but I, for one, am not willing to take that chance with another person's son. Please do not misunderstand me, I know that where sexual sin is real, that right and wrong behavior matters but I am assured that the big deal what sex is down here will not be a big deal up there. Where we are headed there are higher and better pleasures than sexual ones—imagine that!"

Now the second digression had to do with tampering with US Post Office boxes/service, the theft of someone's car title and the subsequent filing of that purloined title for another title resulting in the loss of the lady's vehicle. Now that whole circumstance aside, I suggested that I was not in jail to adjudicate what looks like theft, fraud and property loss. "I urge you to use every recourse that you have to address this matter, to right the injury that you appear to have suffered. I am sorry for your loss. But listen, if you were to treat this whole episode as an accident—knowing that accidents happen—you might be freer to address what went down more freely than if you load it up with grievance, entitlement and retribution. Seek justice by all means, but do not be too invested—*theft happens, people steal and others suffer loss because of it. I wish you well.*"

So we got back on track. I suggested, "Let's suppose that you are remembering things that you should have forgotten because they were forgiven. I am suggesting that it is one of the powers of sin to retrieve that data. It is as if sin has the capacity to go out on the internet of your inner being, find that incident, freshen the episode up and project it, suddenly and without warning, on the live screen of your present consciousness. You feel ambushed. That's because you have been. The accuser of the brethren appears to be cyber savvy. So there you are stewing over your business yet again. It is good to rebuke the power of sin but that may not be sufficient. Here's what going to the root cause might look like. Take the matter to the Lord, and say, "Lord, I distinctly remember now forgiving this, or being forgiven for that. I ask you to cancel that sin once again. I put it before you and under the blood. I repent again. Please cleanse me of it and set me free." Deal with sin directly, cut the wires and disarm the memory to get rid of the memory you never should have had to entertain. Why? Because we have an enemy who loves to drag us down with resentment, bitterness and temptations to avenge ourselves. We say we know the tricks of our enemy. This is one of them I am glad to point out, The Lord has vindicated us already. Remember that instead. We aren't responsible for all that pops up on the screen, but we can be responsible for deleting unwanted content.

Now the other arm of sin's disruption/distortion of memory is: we forget what we ought to remember. Our tendency to forget is widely earmarked in the Scriptures. Remember the Lord, keep his commandments, his laws, ordinances and instruction. We forget the good stuff, the positive injunctions far too readily—our senses get dulled and we start slipping *because* we haven't refreshed, or renewed as we are invoked, commanded to do. Romans 12:2: **And do not be conformed to this [a]world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may [b]prove what the will of God is, that which is good and [c]acceptable and perfect.** You see the problem immediately, don't you? Perhaps there is an overemphasis on the **renewing of your mind** as if overcoming despondency is a matter of changing your mind—just choosing to think about other things, or electing to listen to other inputs—put happier thoughts in our heads and we'll be better *even if not exactly okay*. The shaping power of the word of God—the more we think about the word of God, the more central the word of God is to our consciousness—more front and center, easier to fetch and to recall. I wonder if forgetting the word isn't too strong, perhaps we have only "loosened our grip," maybe our mastery is merely slipping a little. But this transformation, this restoration of our trust in God and His word, His

promises, His gospel is more than mere cognitive activity—it is more accurately the power of God through the indwelling Father and His Son along with the Holy Spirit. It’s a whole spiritual being engagement initiated by the impact of the gospel.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth. (Romans 1:16) “Jesus never fails,” or so we declare in song and the power of the gospel never diminishes, it is an everlasting gospel whose flame doesn’t ever flicker! It conveys **exceeding great and precious promises** like fuel rods inserted into a nuclear reactor! Yes, **the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.**

Nine women, seven men came to jail church—among our largest attendance figures and they followed weeks of small gatherings. The video room flamed with light. Praise God. Remember, God in his mercy sent his Son to make atonement for lost sinners. With his blood he paid for our sins and by faith our sins are forgiven—hearts purged and souls cleansed. No sin was left uncovered, missed, or excluded—all entirely paid for. And after three days in a borrowed tomb, the grave, Jesus rose in resurrection power and glory. Death was defeated and everlasting life was conveyed. All of that God has undertaken for us, and by it we are saved—forgiven, set free and made new. That is the apostolic gospel. That is the ground of our hope. That is the bridge that God has thrown across the abyss between a sinful world and our holy God. God is calling, beckoning all who believe to come to him, to come home to him. And that same invitation is extended to you today. There is only one matter remaining: will you come? Will you take this invitation to the miserable, the hopeless and the despairing? What an awesome opportunity. What an occasion. Today is the day of salvation for all who hear and affirm their reservation.

Amen