

ONE GREAT HOPE

A Letter of Encouragement for Steadfast Endurance

Author:
Grace Minter
Class of 2020
Co-Valedictorian

August 8, 2020



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Fellow graduates, students, parents, brothers and sisters in Christ,

We the class of 2020 have spent the last season in our lives being equipped to go out into the world and bring the light of Christ's gospel to those around us according to our apportioned spheres of influence.

Through the perseverance of our studies, we showed our commitment to this mission. Yet we are graduating into a nation that is fractured and hurting, A world in desperate need of that light. In a society fraught with uncertainty, fear, and turmoil of all kinds, People everywhere are desperately searching for something solid to cling to that will not dissolve underneath them as so many things have recently. They seek a hope they can truly count on, higher ground on which to place their feet. They are becoming more aware than ever that nothing in this world can offer them that solid ground and as a result, hearts are being opened to hear of the one great hope that transcends all the troubles in this dark world.

Thus, We as Christ's message carriers have an unparalleled opportunity to share the light we were given, that is, the gospel of God's son. For it is the firm foundation, the only solid ground on which we can stand safely. Unlike the world, we must not see the recent upheaval as reason to despair, but allow it to set us apart as a people whose life, worth, and identity are unshakable and identity are unshakable, because they are kept in heaven with Christ and secured by the work God has already accomplished. Out of all of scripture, There is one singular verse that illustrates this one great hope more plainly than any other. Genesis 15 verse 17 from the New International Version reads:

“When the sun had set and
darkness had fallen, a smoking
firepot with a blazing
torch appeared and
passed between the pieces.”

GENESIS 15:17



What is this all about? You ask. This verse comes from the passage of scripture which describes the covenant made between God and Abraham (often referred to by Christians as the "old" covenant). By itself, this verse may seem entirely symbolic and hardly relevant to us today. But that could not be further from the truth. We may be tempted to ignore versus like this that make little sense at first glance, yet by doing so, we would be depriving ourselves of the richest treasures God has to offer those who love him..

The passage containing this verse is describing the legal ceremony that took place between God and Abraham as a seal binding their covenant. All cultures throughout history had their own ways of making legally binding oaths or promises between two parties. For example, now adays in America, those entering into a solemn agreement with one another might take turns placing their right hand on a Bible and swearing to fulfil the terms of the treaty.

"We are a people whose life, worth and identity are unshakeable ... because they are in Christ."

"A LASTING COVENANT FOR ALL GENERATIONS"

This is similar to witnesses being sworn in during a legal trial when they swear to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help me God." They are essentially swearing that if they give false witness, a higher power than them will hold them accountable.

The ceremony of Genesis 15 served the same purpose, though the people of that ancient historical period had a much more dramatic way of making promises that carried serious weight. In that time, the custom was for the parties to take certain animals, cut them in half, and place the pieces opposite one another forming a kind of line. Then both parties would detail the terms of the agreement before taking turns passing through these pieces. The symbolism is clear. They were declaring that if they failed to keep up their end, they deserved to be cut in half just like the animals. Now this macabre kind of scene is more than a little cringeworthy to our refined modern ears, but we must remember that God did not engineer this ceremony. He was merely utilizing the ritual that already existed within the cultural context of Abraham's experience to drive his word home to him in a powerful way that he would understand.

"MY WORD WILL BE FULFILLED."

In the boldest and most undeniable way possible, God is saying "Abraham, do you want assurance that I will keep my promise to you? Watch this. This is how you can know that my WORD will be fulfilled.

People swear by something higher than themselves. But unlike us, God cannot swear by the heavens, for they are his handiwork; nor can he swear by the earth, for it is his footstool; and he certainly cannot swear by any human authority, for he is the creator of all life and the establisher of earthly authorities. So what is left? Only himself. God swears on his very being, his eternal, and immutable character. What our God is dramatizing to Abraham through the action of "passing through the pieces" is this:

"If I ever fail to keep a promise to you, may I (the immutable, eternal, self-existent being) suffer mutation. May I who am immortal become mortal, may I who cannot die perish. I swear by my deity That just as you have cut these animals in half, if I ever break my covenant with you, may I be cut in half and destroyed!" (R.C. Sproul)

Thus, we have the most powerful statement in all of scripture of the astounding character of God's faithfulness. To show even more decisively that this Old Testament verse is still very much relevant to the New Testament church, here is how the book of Hebrews explains this passage:

"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." (Hebrews 6:13-19a)

For we serve a God who entered history and redeemed us with his own blood to give us new life in him. And that life is no flimsy thing that can be taken away by world pandemics, natural disasters, human violence, or any other earthly devastation.

We have the assurance that God will sustain our hope and bring light, even out of the darkest times. Anything that is earthly can be snatched away, but God's love through Christ is not of this world and cannot be snatched away. We must hold fast to what is eternally valuable and relinquish what is not in order to grasp more firmly the security that goes beyond this fallen world and is kept safe for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! (1 Peter 1)

As graduates of Mid-Atlantic Christian University, we have spent four or more years being molded and shaped towards the purpose of growing into extraordinary Christian leaders. While we may not remember the difference between a Babylonian and an Assyrian, we should have learned how to think correctly about God, ourselves and the world; and we certainly should have learned to rely on our own feelings less, to evaluate the morals and declarations of our cultural moment carefully, and to love and trust GOD our savior wholeheartedly. For he is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. We have a new life to live, for Christ's glory, rather than our own.

let us be grateful to our parents, our professors and everyone who has helped us along the way. Especially to God who is the founder and perfecter of our faith. As we embark upon our new life journeys, let each of us remember the reason for all we do. .



"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." (Hebrews 6:6-12)

In this world of uncertainty and confusion, let us hold fast to the one great hope: God in his faithfulness has sworn on his very existence that every one of his promises to us will be fulfilled. Our deliverance from sin and its final consequence is guaranteed by his oath.

**Let all we do, whatever we do,
be to bring the news of this
great hope to those
around us by serving as living
witnesses to the love of our
amazing God!**

Sincerely,
Grace