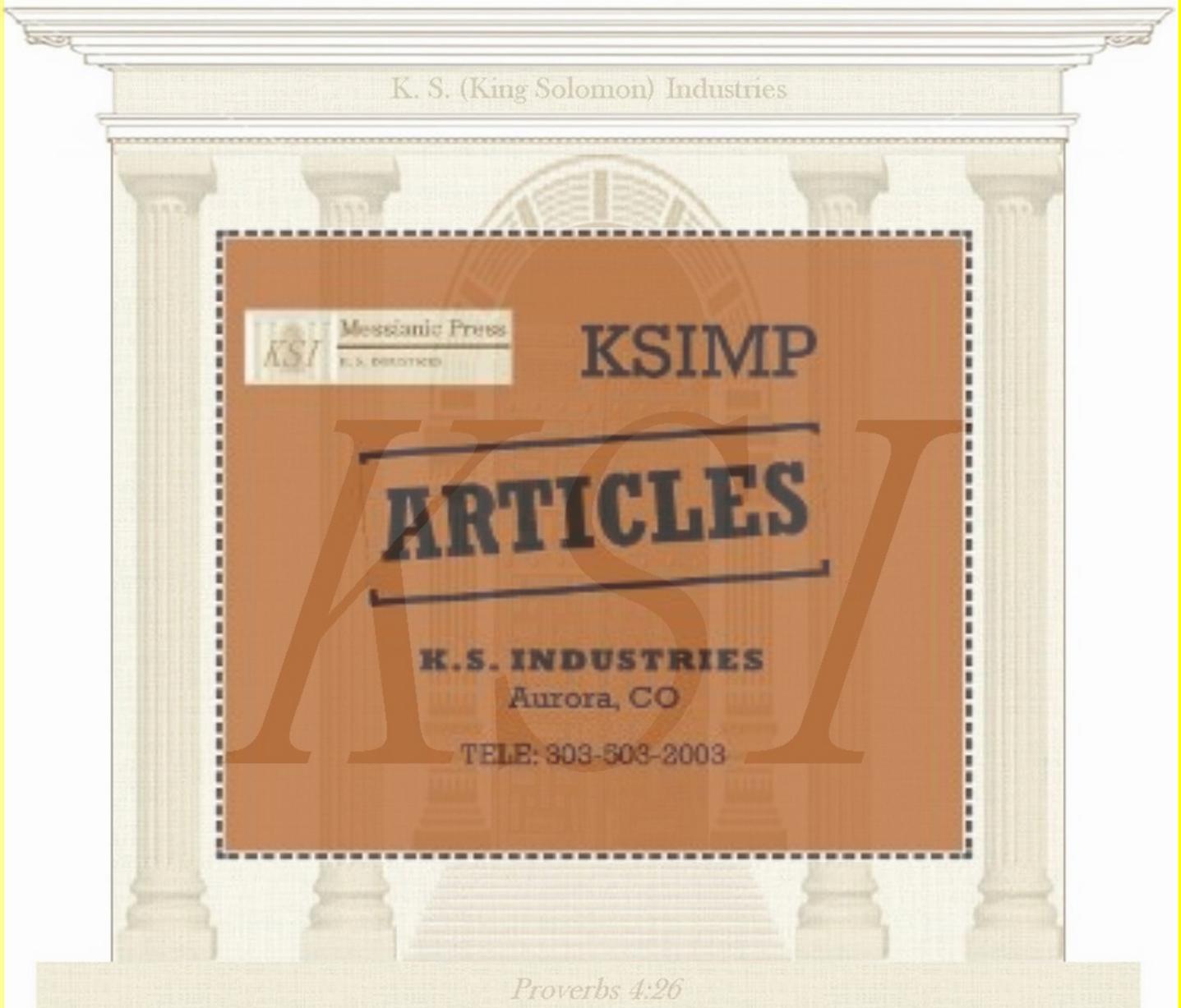


Holding On to Hope Before Eternity

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VANITA LYNN WARREN

Holding On to “Hope” Before Eternity

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Is the “Handwriting on The Wall?” I dread reading the newspaper or listening to the news. Feelings that pervaded Daniel, living in Babylon, engulf my senses. Television is the worst. I grab the channel-surfer and press the button. National headlines appear:

- ⇒ CBS: *“President Belshazzar Can’t Say the “T” Word.”*
- ⇒ NBC: *“Mass Shooting...Again! Why Pray? God Isn’t Fixing This!”*
- ⇒ ABC: *“DOW Hits New Low... No! It’s Up!... No! It’s Down.”*
- ⇒ CNN: *“Mother Earth Needs Your Help. There is No God.”*
- ⇒ C-SPAN: *“Right-Wingers Finally Scheduled for Fiery Furnace.”*

And, *“I Daniel fainted and was sick for days...”* (Daniel 8:27).

Amidst the chaos, I ask the Lord, “When will it end?” I know eternity rests at the end of the tunnel, but my ability to see the light grows bleak and dim against the backdrop of our dying world. How can I detain discouragement and hold on to my faith in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation? Pondering these questions, I turned to Scripture. If I look to God, and walk in the Spirit that dwells within me, I will see His plan. By the rivers of my Babylon, I wait for eternity and find hope in God’s Word.

Look Up: The Power of Prayer

Prayer is always first on my “To Do” list. But, by the time my “to do’s” turn into “action,” prayer finds itself in last place. I often allow my prayer life to take a back seat in my busy schedule. Subsequently, I war in the flesh. The Bible says, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Prayer is one of those weapons.

First Thessalonians 5:16 says to “pray without ceasing.” Prayer is our fuel line from where we derive our strength to make it from day to day. However, the importance of prayer is diminished in our hustle-bustle, Christian lifestyles. Do I have time to “really” pray? You know—Find a quiet spot? Get on my knees? Stay an hour or two for really good prayer? Do it without ceasing? I said, “I don’t think so! I can’t do that! I’m too busy, there isn’t a quiet place, and my knees hurt when I kneel too long. Lord! What do You expect me to do?”

He asked me to change my attitude toward prayer and toward Him. God meant it when he said to “pray without ceasing.” I should have realized, He didn’t ask me to live my life in a closet on my knees. But rather, pray throughout the day—in the quiet closet, in the car, on the bus, tending the garden, strolling in the park. I should be talking to God all day long.

God is our Father. The meaning of “father” doesn’t change just because we’re referring to God. It’s not difficult to call upon our earthly parents. But, for some reason, many envisioned their Father in heaven as untouchable. Many times, I didn’t even give Him credit for being explicitly interested in each moment of my day. Yet, He intently watches everything in my life (Is. 55:8, 9). God’s door is open, and

He's always available to listen and talk to me. Naturally, Satan will insinuate, "*God doesn't have time for those measly little concerns of yours. Don't bother Him with your trivial trials and tribulations.*" But, I can either listen to Satan, or I can listen to God through His word.

Reading Scripture helps me improve my desire to pray. Scripture motivates me to prayer. It teaches me what to pray about and why. If you don't stay in His Word, you will gradually move away from Him. "*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success*" (Joshua 1:8). I had to learn to stop being anxious about the things happening around me, and learn to trust God.

The only way we really get to know our Father in Heaven is to talk and commune with Him 24-7. Prayer isn't just being on your knees. Prayer is in your heart and soul. It's constant communion and fellowship with God, every moment of the day. Only then will we be anxious for nothing, thankful, and at peace in our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:6, 7). Of course, people will think you are crazy because you appear to be talking to yourself all the time...but that's o.k.! You know **Who** you're talking to. Just tell them...*I'm just talking to the Lord!*

Look Around: The Power of God's Grace & Mercy

The only difference between a non-believer and myself is the blood covering of Jesus. No matter how hard I try, I make mistakes. But while I wait for eternity, I know He's my advocate who defends me before the Throne.

Because *He's been there*, Jesus understands every temptation we face. We have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Thus, we can go boldly to the throne of grace, obtain mercy, and find the help we need (Heb. 4:15-16). Christians will never have *carte blanche* to sin. And if they are true Believers, they will not intentionally sin and avoid it at all costs. But as long as we're in imperfect bodies, we'll act in imperfect ways. I have found it easier to overcome temptation when I focus on the sacrifice Christ made on my behalf. I owe Him everything—especially my obedience.

Jesus told his disciples, "*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few*" (Matt. 9:37, 38). Sin is everywhere, and from my point of view, it's increasing. But God said, "*Where sin increased, grace increased all the more*" (Rom. 5:20b). When I view the world from God's perspective, I'm reminded that we are sojourners and ambassadors. We're supposed to take advantage of every opportunity to represent Christ when we come into contact with unbelievers.

Should I preach on my street corner? No! Opportunity refers to how I represent Christ when an occasion presents itself. Is my conversation full of grace, seasoned with salt? Do I know how to answer someone about my faith or about their lack of faith (Col. 4:5, 6)? If I concentrate only on the increase of evil, I will overlook God's abounding grace and mercy in its midst. When I harbor on sin and ungodliness, I become antagonistic toward unbelievers and develop an "us against them" attitude. That attitude is contrary to Scripture's: *Whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report—if there is any virtue and anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things* (Philippians 4:8).

In His word, Jesus said to be very careful how we live. Thus, I need to understand what His will is, be wise, and make the most of every opportunity (Eph. 5:15-17). God made His light shine in our hearts. But we have to remember, the excellence of that power is of God and not of us (2 Cor. 4:7).

Look to Jesus: The Power of Salvation

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...." (Romans 1:16)

I can't expect to hold onto hope if I'm ashamed of the gospel? There were times when an opportunity presented itself to share my faith, or express my belief about a social issue or problem, and I shrank in my seat and tightened my lip. I rationalized, "This is not the time, or place!" I'm glad God didn't say that about my salvation. The flesh is enmity against God. That's why the carnal side of us denies Him. Yet, inside me, His Spirit burns like a fire shut up in my bones, and He won't leave me alone until I *"Tell it."* There is power in salvation, power in us who possess it, and power when it's proclaimed.

Salvation is simple to obtain. But, its benefits are no simple matter. They are truly magnificent. *"In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).* And, there's more! *"Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38).*

Without total faith in the word of God, I'm apt to think, "They must be talking about someone else." I don't deserve such attention. But God loves us, and He holds nothing back. We can trust Him with our faith and our salvation. He will never let us down. Therefore, we can boldly stand with Paul and declare, *"I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).*

Look Beside You: The Power of Fellowship

"'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to His disciples, He said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'" (Matt. 12:18).

I understand fellowship in relation to attending Shabbat or Christian church services—particularly, in relation to being denominational. I am a Messianic with a strong Calvinist, Southern Baptist slant grounded in a Hebraic perspective. There's a debate in the making! However, many believers don't normally gather with Believers of different doctrinal beliefs, so it is natural to stay in their comfort zones and place them outside their "box" with the rest of the world. But early on, I often encountered different denominations bickering about each other. "Those Catholics did this!" Or, "Those Protestants did that!" As a *babe* in Christ, the bickering bothered and confused me. I thought we were on the same team!

So, what is the proper attitude to have toward fellow believers who hold to Scripture? I think it's important for us to keep Paul's perspective on the matter. Ephesians 4:1-6 explains:

1. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received (v. 1).
2. Be completely humble and gentle (v. 2).
3. Be patient (v. 2).
4. Bear with one another in love (v. 2).
5. Make every effort to keep unity of the Spirit (v. 3).

6. Keep that unity through the bond of peace (v. 3)

I learned that the Body of Christ/The Body of Messiah isn't just the group of believers I associate with. It's the vast company of individuals who do the will of my Father in heaven. We're everywhere, and we'll be together in eternity. We all have different jobs that equip and edify other believers (Ephesians 4:11-12). If I do what Christ wants me to do—just my part; then, that's all God requires of me. When I come into contact with fellow believers who have different tasks or gifts, I remember that their differences are for my benefit. And despite our differences, we'll **always** have four things in common:

1. One hope (v. 4).
2. One body and one Spirit (v. 4).
3. One Lord, one faith, and one baptism (v. 5).
4. One God and Father of all (v. 6).

Look Within: The Power of Faith

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"
(Hebrews 11:1).

Do you feel blind and alone? You don't know where to turn for help, and no one seems to understand. Sometimes, I do—usually when I walk by sight and not by faith. "Faith" means you are fully persuaded. When King David fled from Saul (1 Sam. 19-23), and Absalom (2 Sam. 15-17), he cried out to God and kept faith in Him as his deliverer (Psalm 17-18). Paul sat alone in prison waiting for death. Demas, Alexander, and others who would not stand in His defense forsook Him. Nevertheless, Paul knew that the Lord stood with him and delivered him (2 Tim. 4:10-16). In the Garden of Gethsemane contemplating His death, Jesus sweat blood while His disciples slept. He set the ultimate example and submitted to His Father's will (Luke 22:44-46).

Threatened with torture and death, Christians in Communist, Muslim, and Third-World nations stare eternity in the face daily. Jews are perpetually under attack. Those of us in Western Civilization can't begin to comprehend what it means to be persecuted in that manner. Yet, our trials and tribulations are no less important to God. He always dispenses faith in the measure of our need. We are instructed to continue in (Acts 14:22), be strong in (Rom. 4:20-24), and be grounded in (Col. 1:23) faith. It comes from our hearts (Rom. 10: 9,10), and is a requirement of His stewards (1 Cor. 4:2). However, the level of our faith isn't entirely upon our own shoulders. We can go before the Throne of Grace, at any time, and ask for an increase (Luke 17:5). Through faith we will find our greatest moments of rest while we wait for eternity. Scripture proves that faith is the greatest asset a Believer possesses:

1. By faith we have freedom from condemnation (John 3:18).
2. By faith we have peace and rest (Rom. 5:1).
4. By faith we have access to God (Eph. 3:12).
3. By faith we have remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

5. By faith we can overcome the world (1 John 2:13-17).
6. By faith we can resist evil (Eph. 6:16)
7. When tested, faith produces patience, perfection and completeness (James 1:2-4).
8. Faith in the Gospel of Christ reveals the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:17).
9. Everything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

Look Ahead: The Power of Promise

Promise is the conclusion. It's where eternity begins, and where our crown of righteousness is stored. It's where we go after we have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7, 8). Eternity is our assurance that the evil around us will pass away. Even our own sinful nature will be a forgotten thing of the past (1 John 2:16-17).

Like Jesus, we'll receive incorruptible bodies, and glory will be revealed in us. The curse will be lifted, and all of creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:18-21). On the day of our judgment, we'll embrace reward—not punishment (Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:10). We will reign with our Messiah for 1000 years, and afterward Satan, and the death he brought with him, will be removed forever (Rev. 20:6, 10, 14).

Because, no one has seen, heard, or conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1Cor. 2:9); we really don't know what God has in store for us when we get to heaven. Isaiah said, "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God beside you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him" (Isa. 64:4). So, we can surmise that it will be completely different from anything we're familiar with here on earth. But, we do know this: God said, "*Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. **The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind***" (Isaiah 65:17 emphasis added).

These are the promises we hope for, and we can be fully persuaded that God will do all that He said He would do. Remembering God's promises and meditating on them have given me the strength I need to hold onto hope before eternity.

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

