

A.W. Tozer:

The Treachery of Hope Without Faith

June 10, 1956 Evening Service

This morning I talked on a subject that I must deal with again tonight. You might call this little two sermon series, "Hope, the Universal Treasure." And this morning I talked on the blessedness of hope and showed that hope in the natural world is universal, and that it made life livable here below.

Tonight, I want to talk about the treachery of hope, and show that if hope does not have a valid object, its blessing can be turned into a curse. And that which is meant to be a nurse and a guide to lead us home, can become a false teacher to lead us astray.

Now, in the book of Job, the 11th chapter, a man said, if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away. And let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. Then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast and shalt not fear. Because thou shalt forget thy misery and remember it only as waters that pass away. And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday: thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. But here is that terrible swivel word, which we turn about face on, but the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape. And their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost, or as the margin says, their hope shall be as a puff of breath.

Now there are two classes mentioned here. Those that put iniquity far away, stretch out their hands toward God and verse 13, put iniquity far away, put wickedness out of our tabernacles. Then, we shall be secure and rest in hope. But, the eyes of the wicked in contrast, shall fail. They shall not escape. And their hope shall be as a puff of breath.

Now, hope is natural to us, and universal. And if grounded in God, hope is a treasure beyond compare. But, when it rests on nothing more substantial than wishes and fear and unbelief and error, then it is treacherous and betrays our lives to death.

I've been interested to learn that secular thinkers, the great poets and philosophers of mankind, have found hope to be a treacherous thing. Of course, they speak not from the standpoint of God, nobody who has divine inspiration in his hand. Nobody who places his trust in Jacob's God, ever holds hope to be treacherous. But, the secular thinkers, the men of this world, Adams brood, the wise of this world, those who are filled with science, falsely so-called, they are keen and sharp and observant, and they notice, and the bitterness creeps into their voice when they talk about hope.

Sir Philip Sidney says that hope is the fawning traitor of the mind. And another poet says this, hope tells a flattering tale, delusive, vain and hollow. Ah, let not hope prevail lest disappointment follow. And old Henry Constable says, hope like the hyena, coming to be old, alters his shape and is turned into despair.

And now, why do worldly men fear hope? And why do they warn us that hope is the poor man's riches and that we dare not trust it. They're talking from the human standpoint, and they're not believing in God. And therefore, what they say is true. Experience has proved the treachery of hope. Hope without faith is precarious. You see, hope is not wholly false or else we would recognize it for what it is and reject it. And yet it cannot be relied on, because out of God and out of Christ, we rarely attain to our hopes. Or, if we do attain to them, we find they're disappointing at last. And hope is likely to betray our confidence and violate our trust and leave us at last, betrayed, disappointed and filled with despair.

Now, I point out that human hope rarely fulfills its promises. It offers a gold, but it gives only clay instead. It offers centuries and gives only years. It offers years and perhaps gives only days. And sometimes it is false, cruelly, sadistically false. I said this morning that without hope in the world, the human race would die out and all the zest for living would go. That we could not survive adversity or endure pain if we did not have the hope that they would end. And I said that hope would enable the shipwrecked sailor to endure long days that seemed years, out on the bosom of the sea, floating in a boat or on a raft, hoping, always hoping that help would come, and keeps him alive until help does come.

But candor and realism will compel me also to say that a hope has left many a man after telling him for days that help would come, and whispering in his ears that surely, he could not die there on the bosom of the deep. Hope has left him and watched his eyes grow dim and his tongue grows thick and his whole frame grows weaker, until at last he gave up the ghost and his hope was but a puff of breath. I said that the man who was injured or ill might lie in a hospital somewhere, and hope would whisper that he would be better and would keep him alive and keep him sane, until returning health should restore again his strength and drive away the pain. But I must say also that thereâ€™s many a man and many a woman, there have been, who have, say, had cancer or tuberculosis or some other dreaded disease, and have listened to the fawning flatterer hope and have believed that they should get better and live a long life and be useful upon the earth. When at the same time those people never saw another well day and never got out of the bed whereon, they laid dreaming of a bright tomorrow.

Faith is a fawning flatterer of the mind. And if faith has no foundation to rest upon, she is a liar and a deceiver and a Judas who leads the mind of men astray. Hope has whispered to many a mother, that her son missing in action would surely be found and would turn up all right, alive and well. That it was only a mistake and that he would return. And hope has kept that mother waiting for a letter that never came and kept her until she died, waiting for a letter every day. She went and looked every weekday to see whether the letter had come. And she died waiting for a letter that never came and that never could come, because hope had been deceiving her. And the boy that was to have written the letter had long been sleeping in an unmarked grave on a foreign shore.

Hope has told the traveler, if you will travel a little faster and walk a little faster, you will get there before the loved one dies. And the feet that weigh a hundred pounds apiece and the body thatâ€™s exhausted and ready to fall, by the strength of hope managed to stagger on to the cottage and open the door and find the loved one long gone that he had hoped to see. Thatâ€™s why they say that hope is a fawning flatterer of the mind. And thatâ€™s why the poet says hope tells a flattering tale, delusive, vain and hollow. Ah, let not hope prevail, lest disappointment follow.

Now, when is hope trustworthy? When can this become a treasure to us, this universal blessed gift of God to man that keeps him from despair? When is this trustworthy? Hope is trustworthy when it walks with faith. Faith rests on the character of God. Let God be true though every man be a liar. And hope relies on Godâ€™s revealed promise. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, whose hope the Lord is, said Jeremiah. And Isaac Watts said, happy the man whose hopes rely on Israelâ€™s God. He made the sky, the earth, the sea and all therein.

And when we hope in Israelâ€™s God, in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then hope is a blessed nurse and comforter. Hope is a guide and a shield, and hope strengthens us and enables us to endure. Hope takes the sting out of fear. Hope takes the pain out of illness. Hope enables us to go on fighting against hopeless odds, and believing that God has spoken and it shall be so. But, when hope, like the dove of Noahâ€™s ark, flies out of our heart and finds no place for the sole of his feet to rest and comes fluttering weakly back again and rests upon us. Then I say, hope is a flatterer and the Hindu proverb is justified which says there is no disease like hope. But, I can understand why the Hindu can say there is no disease like hope.

Imagine, if you will, the Hindu making his way like in the inchworm from some far part of India to the Ganges River, Old Mother Ganga whose waters were supposed to be able to cleanse sin from the heart of a man. From somewhere, from that light that lighted every man that cometh into the world. From that inbuilt conscience and moral perception, some Indian man became deeply conscious of his sins. And he was told to hope and that if he would punish himself enough, and if he would go and make a trip of pilgrimage to the Ganges River, heâ€™d be delivered from the great crushing burden of sin.

And so, he started from his home and marked a chalk line put his toes toward fell full length, then marked the chalk line where his forehead was and stepped forward to that chalk line on the ground or that mark on the ground, fell full length again. And so, inched himself through hundreds of miles of heat and sand and flies and stinging insects and thirst and hunger and fatigue, until at last, he smelled the waters of the Ganges there. And hope, the fawning flatterer said, now your troubles are all over and the burden of your sin will roll away, washed in the Ganges.

And so, he took that painful, emaciated form and dragged it into the sacred waters of Mother Ganga and when plunging into the filthy waters, submerged himself, immersed himself in its sacred waves. He crawled back to the bank, drank a bit of water and ate a little food, believing now that his sins would roll away. But as he slowly went back retreating or retracing his steps in the direction from whence he came, he found the sense of sin and the consciousness of iniquity still on his heart like a great crushing burden. In his disappointment and

bitterness, he said, hope is the worst disease of all.

When hope has no place to rest. When there is no revealed truth back of it, when there is no, thus saith God. When there is no blood of the Lamb, no cross, no atonement, no mighty speaking voice of God to hold it up, then faith can be their worst deceiver and the worst disease of all. And there are religious-minded people and church people by the thousands who are hoping against hopeless, hope that will betray them at last.

There is that hope that says my sins are not so bad after all. I've been a reasonably good man. And certainly, I'm not a murderer. Certainly, I'm not a robber. I've had my faults, but I'm a decent fellow. And there's many a church member that has joined the church and been baptized and takes the Lord's Supper, and all the hope he has in the wide world is that he is a reasonably good fellow. Every cannon of God is trained on that man's soul. And every sword of justice in heaven above and earth beneath is waiting to cut that man down. And every threatened warning and admonition of a holy God is aimed against that man's head like a gun. And that man, though he may be a deacon or an elder or a pastor indeed, he has not the remotest reason to hope in all the wide world. Hope is a fawning, flatterer and whispers to his unborn-again soul that he doesn't need to repent and be born again like bums in a rescue mission. That he's a decent fellow, comes from a good family, drives a good car and lives on a good street. My brother, such hope is but a disease worse than all and a flatterer that fawns and betrays and lies and damns at last.

And then there's the hope that says, my good deeds will justify me. I've been a bad man, but if I turn and do good now and give of my money and go to church and pray and have family prayer and read my Bible and do good, I shall surely be saved at last. And when God balances my evil deeds against my good deeds in the great balance scale of justice in eternity, surely my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds. And you'd be surprised how many people raised under the sound of the gospel still believe that ancient heresy. And hope whispers the lie that says your good deeds will get you in. My brother, your good deeds can't get you in and your bad deeds can't keep you out if Jesus Christ our Lord becomes your Advocate, and Savior.

Jesus Christ is your hope and should be your hope. God says that except a man repent, he shall perish. And Jesus Christ says that there's no name under heaven given among men, save the name of Jesus, whereby men should be saved. And the Scripture says that men are not saved by works, but by grace through faith, and it's a gift of God. And all of Romans and all of Galatians and all of Colossians and all of John and all of the teachings of Jesus and all of the teachings of the Apostles are aimed like a gun against the man that says, I'll let my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds. I have lied and stolen and committed adultery and tramped around nights, but I've stopped all that. And I'll try to undo it, and make the water run uphill and make the iron swim and reverse the course of justice. And I will be a good boy now and God will overlook my sins. My brother, if you were to suddenly turn into an archangel and shine with iridescent beauty as the angels above, you'd still go to hell unless sin has been washed from your soul by the blood of the Lamb.

And then, hope says to some that God will be merciful to them, and that God isn't as bad as He's made out to be. That He's a good fellow and it will all be well, as Omar Khayyam said. He's a good fellow and it will all be well. Why be so excited about religion? Why take it all so seriously. Everything will be alright. God's a good fellow. And He understands our frame, and He knows we're dust; and everything will be all right. My brother, mercy is a stream, and mercy flows within its banks. And we'll come to that stream and bathe or we'll perish.

Mercy does not hunt a sinner that's running away. Mercy does not run down a back alley and into a whore's den and dig a man out against his will and wash him and make him clean against his will. No, we must confess our sins. If we confess our sins, then He has mercy upon us. And He's merciful and just and righteous and forgives our sins and cleanses us from iniquity. But an uncleansed sinner is a lost man. Let hope flatter and whisper and fawn, and breath her moist breath on our neck and pat our shoulders and tell us it's all right. Hope lies. For wherever there is sin, that man belongs below, and none above; not with a holy God, but with an unholy devil.

And then hope says, I can continue on in sin and still be alright. Hope says, everybody has sinned and therefore I don't need to be delivered from sin. I can still hold black malice in my heart and still be a member of the kingdom of God. I can be a liar when I need to be and steal into the kingdom of God. I can still practice impurity and enter the kingdom of God. I can still hold grudges against my brother. I can still gossip and assassinate character. I can still practice worldliness and love worldly pleasures, and still be a child of the Eternal Father and a brother of the Eternal King.

Oh, my brother, the man of God who knows what He's talking about, says, my children, I have warned you

and I warn you again that they that practice such things shall not enter the kingdom of God. Only the blood-washed, only those who have put malice from their heart, only those who have stopped lying, not the liar can enter the kingdom of God. But the ex-liar can. Not the impure man, but the ex-libertine can. Not the man who holds a grudge, but the man who used to hold a grudge. Not the woman who gossips can enter heaven, but the woman who used to gossip, but has been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

And then hope whispers and says, show the good side of your life and don't cause others to stumble. And even if you do live an impure or a wicked or dishonest life in secret, what will be the difference? Well, the man of God said bluntly, the hope of the hypocrite shall perish. And what shall be the hope of the hypocrite when God taketh away his soul? The public may not know, but the Judge of all the earth knows. The church may not know, but the Head of the church knows. Your family may not know, but the great God, the Most High God, Maker of heaven and earth whose fiery eyes sees through the souls of men, He knows.

Don't imagine that you can have two faces and God will save one of them. God never saves two faces. No two-faced man was ever been converted or saved since the world began. A two-faced man is as much of a monstrosity in heaven as a two-headed baby is in a hospital. And God Almighty will never take a man with two faces into the kingdom. Only one face, that's all, only one. And though your face is black with gazing, lined with sin from looking upon evil; if you will believe and turn away from that evil gaze and fix the gaze of your soul on the dying Lamb whose precious blood has never lost its power, God will save that one face of yours. But, if you look at God with one face and at sin with another and hide the face that looks at sin and never let your neighbor know you have it, you'll perish as sure as the sparks fly upward. And as sure as the lead goes down, and as sure as God is holy and as sure as heaven is high, and as sure as hell is low, the hypocrite will perish. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul.

My brethren, there are three worlds. We live in one of them now. And this earth is bearable because there is hope. And I said this morning and repeat, that for no other reason, is this world bearable. The man who lies in pain in a hospital tonight wouldn't get off that bed; he would commit suicide lying there if he didn't believe there was hope. The man in prison would go crazy and become completely demented if he didn't believe there was hope. Even the man who is going to die in the electric chair or at the end of a rope, still keeps sane because he believes until the trap is sprung or the switch is thrown, that there's hope and he's going to be saved.

Earth is bearable because there is hope. And hell is unendurable because there is no hope. Old Dante knew too well, and built with theological precision into his shocking and terrifying picture of the inferno. He built this thought, and said in the deepest lowest hell from which there was no escape, on the entablature over the door, there was deeply engravened these words, “All hope abandon ye who enter here.”

Earth, I say, is bearable because there is hope. And when the baby's temperature flares, and the little eyes shine too bright and the cheeks are too red, the mother hopes that it's only a passing thing and the baby will be better tomorrow. A shipwrecked sailor hopes and awaits his rescue. The man in his cell hopes and sometimes receives his pardon. The man in the sick room hopes and sometimes, health returns. But in hell there is no hope. And that's why hell is unendurable. Nobody can go to another there in that terrible place and say, we'll be better tomorrow. For it will never be better. No one can ever hum, there's a better day coming, I know I know, it will not always, not always be so. No, no, nobody can ever go to another and say cheer up, the worst is past. For the Bible says that there is no hope in hell. All hope abandon ye who enter here.

And while earth is bearable because there is hope and hell unendurable because there is no hope, heaven is eternal beatitude, because there, hope is in radiant fulfillment. All the dreams of the race are fulfilled in wonderful, generous fulfillment. Don't you imagine that any poet or any humanists or any psalmist ever dreamed a dream that cannot out-soar God's reality? No, no, let not a David who talks about seeing God in the morning. Not at John who saw the Holy City coming down clothed as a bride adorned for her husband. Not John in all of his high dreams could ever dream a heaven as great as heaven will be. Not all the language used in the Bible to describe that glorious shining place can do justice to that place itself.

For no human being, no mortal, no finite mind, can ever grasp the wide-ranging, out-soaring glories that belong to God Almighty. I say that in heaven, there is glorious fulfillment. And that's why Heaven is eternal beatitude. And we say well, when we see heaven, we'll have seen it. We will have seen the whole thing. It'll be like standing at Niagara after dreaming about it for a long time and seeing it rolling there. And after an hour's gazing, we would shrug and walk away. Heaven won't be one thing to be seen or tasted or touched or smelled or enjoyed. Heaven will be an infinite fold within fold, height upon height, pile upon pile, story upon story, glory upon glory while the ages roll. Heaven will be eternal beatitude, because there I say,

hope is in radiant fulfillment.

But there is no hope in hell. These terrible, wonderful words, if thou prepare thine heart and stretch out thine hands toward God, and if iniquity be in thine hand and now put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles, then thou shalt be secure because there is hope. And thou shalt take thy rest in safety and thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the puff of a breath. How terrible my brother!

Hope without Christ is a leaky boat. Hope without Christ is a weak bridge. Hope without Christ is the worst disease of all. And how foolish to nourish a groundless hope tonight when there is hope in God. Happy the man whose hope relies on Israel's God. He made the skies. And he sent his Son to save from sin and darkness and the grave. And tonight, he calls you. And Peter calls this hope, a living hope as I pointed out. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Which according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled that faded not away, reserved in heaven for you, incorruptible, undefiled and unfading. It can't rot. It can't become impure, and it can't fade away. And there isn't a treasure on earth, not even the diamond, not the pearl, not the silver, not the gold, can this be said of.

We're kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, thou now for a season, if need be, you're in heaviness through manifold temptations. Now brethren, you need not go out of here trusting in a vain hope. You need not be the fool of that treacherous siren that lies about your future. You can put your hope in the cross of Jesus. And he who dies believing, dies safely through His love. And you cannot only die believing, you can live believing. And the hope of the Christian is a safe hope. And the Christian is the only one who has any right to hope. For it's the only one whose hope relies on God.

So, you can tonight know that you can go out of this place with a hope that's as big as the world and as long as eternity, and as deep as hell and as high as heaven, and know that you don't have to apologize nor wonder about it. Thou shalt lie down in safety because thou hast hope. Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him.

What about it this evening? Are you hoping now in Jesus' blood? Are you hoping in God's spoken Word, thy sins be forgiven thee. Are you hoping now in the merits of the blood of the Lamb? If you are, happy are you. Happy are you. But, if you're not, you have no right to be happy and no right to hope. For the man in Adam, hope is a treacherous siren. To the man in Christ, hope is a precious treasure. Don't let your hope betray you to death. Jesus calls us out of the tumult, and He calls us to His heart, into His cross, into His feet. And He calls us not to come on our feet, but in our hearts, a journey for the heart to Jesus Christ.

Why not tonight? I know this is a rather small crowd for us. And maybe that not many are here this evening who are out of Christ. But, if there should even be one, I beg of you, start your inner feet in motion and turn away from all that's wrong and face toward the cross of Jesus. Put your hope in God's Eternal Son. And thou shalt lie down in peace and well shall it be with thee. Let us pray.