

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



February 17, 2013

Happy Thoughts

One of the chief obstacles to us achieving what God desires for us is our own negative self-image. But God does not share that perspective of us; in fact, He is our greatest fan.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11).

These words were part of a letter Jeremiah sent to the captives exiled in Babylon (v. 1), following the second deportation. Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed, so a few of these exiles clung to hope that the crisis would pass and they would soon be going home. But most had given up all hope, believing that their nation was doomed, along with their dreams of a glorious future.

Jeremiah’s letter addressed both groups. No, they would not be going back home any time soon; but neither would their national identity become lost in the fog of history. Instead, he assured them that their captivity in Babylon would last seventy years, then they (or more likely, their children and grandchildren) would return to rebuild their nation (v. 10). Despite their terrible circumstances, God was not finished with His people yet. He still nurtured “thoughts of peace” toward them, and was eager to give them “a future and a

hope.” Their challenge was to cling to that promise of a brighter future, and not give in to a spirit of despair.

But what is even more remarkable about this divine promise is that it was given to people who earlier had been harshly rebuked by God for their sins (e.g., “I will certainly bring calamity on this people . . . because they have not heeded My words”, Jer. 6:19). Babylon was their punishment, but it was not their final destiny.

This story reveals an intriguing truth about God’s character that we often overlook. While He is disappointed, even angry, over the sins we commit, He never gives up on us. Even as He allows us to suffer for the mistakes we have made, He still harbors “thoughts of peace” toward us, looking forward to the day when we will see the light, come to our senses, and return to Him with humble hearts. Despite our stumbles, He still sees the potential for much good in us, if we will only come back to Him.

So what prevents us from returning to God? In some cases it’s defiant rebellion, a meanness that requires a very

hard knock to dislodge. But in many cases the chief obstacle is not so much our attitude toward God, but *what we think about ourselves*. We view ourselves as weak, pathetic, worthless, incapable of good, hopelessly enslaved to a past that we are ashamed of. Burdened with that sorry self-image, we don’t even *try* to return to God, because we know we’ll fail.

But if God still desires what is good for us, despite our faults, then we have no reason to give up on ourselves. Paul describes God as our biggest fan: “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:31, 37). If God is so confident of our future success, isn’t that a powerful incentive to never give up?

Jeremiah’s message is still valid today: God thinks pleasant thoughts about us, regardless of what we’ve done, and believes we are capable of so much better. That confidence should overwhelm the negativity that shackles us, and empower us to achieve all that God believes we are capable of achieving.

– David King