

Hopes of Confidence-Men

By Nathan Warner

Hope is a desired destination. We look towards our hope, and what we see from a distance offers us assurance of its truth. Faith and trust are the firm, grounded substances needed for us to “walk” to that Hope. When Believers look for Hope in any situation, they always find themselves “*looking to Jesus*” (Hebrews 12:2a) and their Faith in Him is “*the substance of things hoped for*” (Hebrews 11:1a KJV). This substance supports their walk towards their Hope.

Hope found by looking in any other direction or into any face other than Jesus is a false, vain hope that may appease our feelings and senses for a time in its emotional con-game but ultimately will prove its falsehood when the snare is sprung. Con-men often use “hope” to get what they want. They offer people the hope of making easy money, hope that something will solve someone’s problems, hope that they can get someone out of trouble, etc. Hopes are a hot commodity in the world because all humanity is searching for some assurance in their lives that they can trust in, some reassurance that things will turn out okay or that they can improve their situation.

False prophets are spiritual confidence-men (the root for con-man) that earn people’s confidence, trust, support, loyalty, money, etc., by peddling “hope” in tough times or by ascribing a higher power’s approval or mandate for an action in order to lull people into trusting them enough to enter a snare. False prophets try to make people feel good about themselves and their behavior, or they try to create a false sense of guilt to leverage for their purposes. A false prophet has no desire to speak the truth because the “*the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32b) from the snare they are leading you towards. They do not wish to improve the fortunes of the people they are deceiving but rather to keep them in bondage to themselves or to whom they work for.

Ezekiel gives us a vision of what this looks like: “*Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice*” (Ezekiel 22: 27-29). Here we see false prophets covering for the actions of evil men. How often in the apostate church today are pastors, teachers, and leaders speaking words for God that are not His, covering for extortions and robberies done by wicked men who are destroying lives?

Jeremiah tells the hopeless people of Jerusalem after the destruction of their land, “*Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading*” (Lamentations 2:14). Any false or misleading direction encourages someone to abandon the Way and leads them into snares, mires, and traps that end in destruction, desolation, and despair. We are not to listen to false hopes: “*Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, “It shall be well with you”; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, “No disaster shall come upon you”’*” (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

Human nature loves to have “reasons” that justify why we behave the way we do. The sinful flesh loves to have blessings for the behavior that it wants to do. The flesh loves to live in the

delusion because it believes it is acquitted of responsibility for its actions. So many churches now encourage the ways of the World in their congregation saying, “No disaster will come upon you!” They condone adultery, fornication, stealing, and deception with their false prophecies: *“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?”* (Jeremiah 5:30-31) As Jeremiah points out, everything seems to be going along just fine until the con is finally sprung and disaster falls on everyone who believed in the false hope. There is an “end” to false hope, and it is disaster, ruin, and further despair for the people deceived, while the con-men *“revel in their deceptions”* (2 Peter 2:13b). But Scripture warns them that *“the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands”* (Psalm 9:16b).

Most people who have been conned learn from the experience and do not fall for false hopes again, but some people perpetually fall prey to con-men, loving the emotional high they get when they believe and trust in the lies and the false hopes that they are special, will succeed, or will gain what they desire. How quickly they forget the “disaster” afterwards: *“as a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly”* (Proverbs 26:11).

False prophets are not a relic of the ancient world; Jesus warned us to *“watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves”* (Matthew 7:15). He told us that in the Last Days *“many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people”* (Matthew 24:10-11). We are also warned in Revelation about the False Prophet that will prepare the way of the Beast with false signs and wonders. There are so many “sheep without a shepherd” in the churches of our time, led about from con-man to con-man, always trusting no matter that they are always led astray with false hopes.

The True Hope – the Hope of Believers will be manifest in the Resurrection of our corruptible bodies into incorruptible bodies in the New Heavens and the New Earth. All believers before us have *“died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland...a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city”* (Hebrews 11:13-14 & 16b).

But as Believers who have to live daily in the world, how do we avoid the snares of confidence-men and false prophets while we wait for our Hope? David explains: *“The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts”* (Psalm 119:110). It is by living in God’s Word and walking after Him when He says “follow me” that we safely navigate the wiles of the World and the Devil. Only by “fixing our eyes on Jesus” do we have assurance in a *“living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Peter 1:3), fleeing to Him from the dead, decaying hopes of the World that are dressed up as living and paraded on the stage.

“We who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:18b-20).

The Hope of God is no road-show or stage production to entertain us along the straight and narrow road. It is a living, lasting, and enduring Hope - a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul that keeps our eyes fixed on Jesus and strengthens our legs to follow Him in Faith and trust.

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

(2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)