

A Hope Deferred

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12, ESV)

What is hope deferred? Hope is that thing we faithfully press on believing in, in spite of any doubt that may arise. Job had a hope that he would be justified by his Creator, "Oh that I might have my request, and that God would fulfill my hope." (Job 6:8) What was causing Job grief? He had lost his family, his possessions, his health, but he also felt discouraged because that thing he hoped against hope for seemed distant. Job hoped that God would justify him for his faith in the face of those who mocked and discouraged him because he trusted God.

When hope is deferred, it makes the heart sick; it makes sugar taste sour; it makes the most indomitable growling bear whimper back to its dark cave; it pushes down the courage of a stalwart army sieging the walls of an impregnable city; it sends the constant northern star south; it is a cloud over the desert that teases the land with rain but does not seem to deliver; it is the package or letter that never arrives in the mailbox; it is the phone call from home never received since it is never made. A hope deferred is that which we sink the anchors of our desires in anticipation of a tug on the line. Here's how writer Langston Hughes applied a hope deferred, which for him is a dream deferred, a vision of the future that never seems to come to pass:

"What happens to a dream deferred?"

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

In the face of all this, the Proverbist tells us: A desire fulfilled is a tree of life. A tree of life! Like that eternal tree that is rooted in the midst of God's garden in paradise. (Gen. 2:9) When we hope in the one whom God gave for us, Jesus Christ, we do not hope in nothing but we hope in the joy of man's desire. Though we face trouble in our lives, our hope will not be deferred in Christ, "Who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." (1 Pet. 1:21) And as John said, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates." (Rev. 22:14) When we suffer because we have hoped in things that are transient and passing, let us reconsider our hopes by trusting in the one who is yesterday, today, and tomorrow.