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## A BRIGHT FUTURE

Proverbs 24:13,14

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Once a little boy by the name of Jody wrote a letter to his teacher at school. The letter read like this:

Dear Teacher,

Today mommy cried. Mommy asked me, “Jody, do you really know why you are going to school?” I said, “I don’t know why.” She said it is because we are going to be building me a future. I said, “What is a future? What’s one look like?” Mommy said, “I don’t know, Jody. No one can really see all your future. Just you. Don’t worry because you’ll see. You’ll see.” That’s when she cried and said, “Oh, Jody, I love you so.” Mommy says, “Everyone needs to work really hard for us kids to make our futures the nicest ones the world can offer.” Teacher, can we start today to build me a future? Can you try especially hard to make it a nice pretty one just for Mommy and for me? I love you teacher.

Love,

Jody

This little boy does not quite understand what future is. Those of us who are adults think we know what future means, but we find it difficult to explain what it is. But I think everyone desires a good future for one’s family and for one’s friends and for oneself.

The scriptural text given to us today is Proverbs chapter 24, verses 13 and 14. This text teaches us where is the key to unlock a good future for each one of us. Let us read it again, “Eat honey, my child, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.” The proverb says, “Eat honey, for it is good.”

Honey is an amazing food. I once heard that a jar of honey was found in an ancient pyramid of Egypt. And in spite of the fact that the honey was thousands of years old it tasted just like our honey today. We can understand people cherished honey from ancient days. In First Samuel Chapter 14, we find a story of Jonathan, the son of the first king of Israel, Saul, eating honey in a wood during a war between Israelites and Philistines. The Scripture says, "When Jonathan ate honey from a honeycomb, his eyes brightened." Honey is indeed an amazing food, it is good for our body and it certainly is sweet to our taste. And the Proverbs likens wisdom to honey. "Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off."

Just as honey is good and sweet to your body and it brightens your eyes, so is wisdom to your soul and it gives a bright future for you. This is the Word of the Lord and the promise of God. What an amazing promise this is! The key to unlock a good future for each one of us lies in finding the wisdom.

We are living in an age when it is very difficult to find hope for our future. We are living in a fast changing, fragile world where nothing is predictable. People find it difficult to dream a dream for their futures. There seem to be too many obstacles and troubles and conflicts to find a hope for the future. But the unchanging message of the Bible is, "There is hope for your future, and your hope will not be cut off."

We human beings can not live without hope. We must have hope in order to live. Though the world around us may be hopeless and dark and desperate, we must always keep hope for our future. However difficult your life may be now, you need to cling to a hope for the future.

Victor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist, wrote a book based on his experiences in the concentration camp under the Nazi regime during World War II. He observed his fellow Jews and vividly saw that those people who lost hope for their future locked in the concentration camp sooner or later breathed their last, but those who kept hope and somehow clung to hope continued to live unless they were killed. From his observation of this extraordinary experience, he seems to be saying how vitally important for anyone under any circumstances to have a hope for one's future in order to continue to live a meaningful life.

Then where and how can we find a future hope? The Bible says, it lies in your finding "wisdom" and in the Book of Proverbs, the primary message is "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It says, wisdom begins from "fearing the Lord." Of course this "fear" does not mean "being afraid or scare of," but rather it means "trusting the Lord," "clinging to the faithfulness of the Lord," and "believing the steadfast love

of the Lord,” as found in many verses of the Proverbs. If you grasp this amazing love of God, you begin to find wisdom, and that wisdom unlocks the door of your future hope. Trusting in the Lord in every way all the time rather than leaning on what we think we know is the key to unlock the door to our future hope. The love of God is expressed vividly in that blessed verse in Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

One Sunday morning a middle-aged man came to church where we were pastoring in Tokyo. He worshiped with us for the first time in his life. He seemed very gentle and kind. He continued to come to church since then. After several months passed, one Sunday evening after the service, some of us got together. He was among us and he seemed to feel accepted by us, though he was very quiet and gentle and had not opened his heart to us. As we were casually talking and sipping tea together, he began to talk with frequent pauses. He said, “I am a sick person. I have been suffering depression and neurosis since my college age. And two years ago I had an operation on thyroid gland cancer and am taking medication still now. I am afraid it might relapse. My sister committed suicide seven years ago. I am interested in Christianity, but I can not find faith.”

After hearing this, we all began to pray for him earnestly. Oh, what a heavy burden he is carrying for his life. Our brothers and sisters in church began to remember him in their private prayers and it became our real concern that he find the Lord and a future hope to live. But before I tell you what happened to him when the whole church began to pray for him earnestly, let me share with you a story I heard last week at a Regional Education Conference held in Bangkok. A Korean professor from Korean Nazarene University brought a morning devotion and he told a true story which happened during the Korean War in 1950's. When the war broke out, people began to flee to seek refuge. Among them was a young girl who was pregnant, near her time of childbirth. There was no one to help her, and there was no house, no bed, no pillow for her to rest her body. She had to flee but could not run because of her pregnant child. It was a very cold windy day in December. She could not find any heat, blanket or food. After seeking a place of refuge in vain, she went beneath a bridge on the cold dirt, and she gave birth to a child. There was no one to help her delivery. And it was a bitter cold night, the night of December 24th to be exact. The young mother took off all her clothes to bundle up her baby and tried to protect the little life. The next morning, one American missionary couple was delivering food and clothes to those people in need, they found the baby bundled in the mother's clothes and the young mother already lying dead virtually naked in the icy cold weather. The missionary

couple discovered that the baby still breathed, rushed to their home to keep the baby warm and safe. They also buried the young girl reverently with due ceremony. They adopted the baby and raised him as their child. As the child grew older, the missionary couple told him about his real mother. When the boy was eleven years old, after hearing about how he was born, the boy asked the parents to take him to his mother's grave. When the boy came to his mother's grave, he took off his coat and clothed the gravestone with his coat. And the boy said to his real mother, "I will live and protect you. And I will be a good person."

When I heard this story, I couldn't help but think that the young mother's love reveals the love of God in Christ for the whole world. Just like what this young girl did to save her child, Jesus Christ suffered humiliation, pain, agony, and gave up His life on that cross to save you and me. Christ died for my sins, for me, even me. In order to give us eternal life, He loved me and gave Himself up on that cross and died for you and me. This is how we know God's love: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. "We love Him, because He first loved us." The love of God is ultimately revealed in Christ Jesus at the cross. And when we grasp how much God loves us, we begin to live, we begin to love, and begin to serve. And most of all we begin to find a future hope. We begin to hear God say to you in your heart, "There is hope for your future." You hear it directly from God, "There is hope for your future." Things around you may all point toward hopelessness, but you hear that still small voice saying, "There is hope for your future." When you are connected tightly with the love of God revealed through Christ, you hear it every time you feel depressed.

Let me return to the story of the gentleman who came to our church seeking after God. I was saying that the whole church was praying for him earnestly that he might come to know the love of God. Several weeks passed after he first shared his burdens. He sought after God earnestly. Then one Sunday evening after the evening service, during fellowship time, he said quietly that he wanted to be baptized. I asked him, "Do you mean you now believe in Jesus Christ?" He said, "Yes." When the people heard his soft but determined answer, "Yes," they began to shed tears. And we prayed, thanking God that he believed in Jesus Christ. He said, "I thought I had to carry the burden of my sins by my own strength. But I learned and understood that Jesus Christ died for my sins and gave me forgiveness. My heart is liberated for the first time in my life. I now know that the life I now live, I live not by my own strength but by the love and grace of Christ who loved me and died for me." From that time on, he began to see a

future hope and he began to smile. We saw his life transformed by God. His burdens of life were there with him, but he carried them with Christ who strengthens him.

If we find wisdom, if we grasp the truth of how much God loves us, if we trust Him and cling to Him rather than cling to what we think we know, then we find that there is a future hope for our lives and that hope will not be cut off.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, thank you for your amazing love. Your unchanging eternal love gives us life, love, and a future hope. Our hope rests on nothing but your atoning love and sanctifying grace. May we grow in the knowledge of your love and grace, and may your love fill us until we cannot help but will to live and love and hope. This we pray in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.