

Why We Need Hope

Coming off a study of the book of Daniel, we have to be careful that we don't become paranoid. We realize that we're living in a world that's demonstrating the signs that Jesus was talking about when He said in Matt. 24: 6, 7:

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars... Nation will rise against nation... There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

On top of this, our culture is marinating our minds in messages of pure hopelessness. Scientists like Richard Dawkins tell us that we live in a universe that has "...no design, no purpose, no evil and no good." Hollywood preaches through the new cynical heroes, like Rustin Cohle from the HBO show "True Detective," that "everybody's nobody," and we live in a world that is a "giant gutter in outer space." ⁱ

But does this negative and hopeless worldview really have an impact on people? Yes, it does. Listen to these statistics. In one decade, from 1999 to 2010, the suicide rate among Americans aged 35 to 64 rose by nearly 30%. So, there are now more deaths from suicide than from car accidents. The most pronounced increase is among men in their 50s, where the rate jumped by 50% in ten years. ⁱⁱ

But with the threats of terrorism and diseases with no cure and whole countries declaring bankruptcy, how can anyone NOT be hopeless? That's what we're going to explore ALL SUMMER here in worship. Today we begin with the reasons why we need hope. First...

I. We Need Hope to View the World Properly

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes a time when he nearly lost all hope. In fact, he DID lose hope of staying alive. He writes:

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. (II Cor. 1: 8b, 9a)

Paul believed in God but he truly saw no way that his life was going to continue. That's a dark place. And he was on a mission for God! This wasn't while he was hunting down Christians. No, he was serving God faithfully and he became convinced that he was finished.

Have you ever been in a hopeless place like that? You're living a life of faith and WHAM! You're hit with cancer or you lose your job or your service for God is suddenly imploding. Did you find yourself asking God, "Father, what's going on? Why have You allowed this problem, this sickness, this attack, when I'm doing Your will?" Can you feel those questions? Have you ever lived there?

Paul did. Now look at what he learned. He writes:

But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (II Cor. 1:9b)

God was teaching Paul a crucially important truth: what things look like to us aren't always what they really are. What it looked like to Paul was that he and his traveling companions were being punished or attacked. It was logical. If you went by

the physical evidence, that is what it looked like was happening. But he said, what God was teaching him through that experience was that He is the God of the impossible. He is the God who is capable of “raising the dead.” And God wanted Paul to trust Him more than relying on his own gifts and abilities.

How much do you trust the invisible Hand of God versus your own gifts from God? Have you ever worked incredibly hard on some project and, though you had done something like that before with great success, this time nothing seemed to work? What’s the temptation? Isn’t it tempting to put the blame on someone else because it couldn’t be your fault! The last time you carried out the same behaviors it worked fine. But Paul comes to a different conclusion. He concludes that his trouble was actually from God Who was protecting Paul from putting too much trust in his own abilities. And once Paul learned that lesson, then what did God do? Verse 10:

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope... (II Cor. 1:10)

John Calvin wrote, “...there is nothing more injurious to faith than to fasten our minds to our eyes, that we may, from what we see, seek a reason for our hope.” Only when our hope is in the invisible God will we have a proper view of reality.

II. We Need Hope to Stay on God’s Path

In Romans 4, the Apostle Paul is talking about Abraham. He’s pointing out that, though Abraham and Sarah were both older than dirt, God told them that they would have a baby boy through a natural childbirth process. Everyone, even his wife, laughed at him for believing what God had promised. And even though Abraham had done things in his life that didn’t demonstrate a lot of faith, at critical moments, he acted out of a profound trust in God. Paul describes it this way:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him... being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Rom. 4:18, 21)

The first phrase in verse 18 literally says, “...who beyond hope, on hope believed.” What in the world does that mean? Paul is describing the difference between human hope and divine hope. Human hope is based on past experiences, on what we’ve come to know is possible in the physical world. The best hitter on a baseball team comes up to bat with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth, down by one run and we hope he gets a hit. We’ve seen him do it before and we hope he can do it again.

Divine hope is different from that. Divine hope is based on what God says He will do, even if we’ve never seen Him do it before. On two occasions, Abraham took action believing that God could bring life out of death, though he’d never seen Him do it before. The first time was when he believed that God could bring a child out of Sarah’s “dead” womb, even though she didn’t even believe it. And the second time was when he believed that, even if he sacrificed their only son, Isaac, on the altar, God could raise him from death, bringing him back to life again. Heb. 11:19 says:

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

So, what would cause Abraham to do such an illogical thing as that? Well, it’s actually not illogical at all. In fact, the Greek word translated “reasoned” (*logisamenos*) means to “calculate” as an accountant calculates the financial report

at the end of the month. Abraham didn't raise a knife to kill his son hoping blindly that maybe God would stop him. No. He "did the math," so to speak, on God's character. He added up what he knew to be true about God and just like an accountant who, after running the numbers knows exactly how much money there is in the bank and then writes the checks knowing that they won't bounce, Abraham's hope enabled him to take action, even when people around him were paralyzed. This is why it says that Abraham was "fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised." (Rom. 4:21)

So, what kind of hope do you have? Hebrews 1 defines the relationship between faith and hope. Listen:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Heb. 11:1)

Do you see the relationship? Faith and hope are tightly connected. I think of it this way: hope is having the vision to see what is possible, and faith is believing it will happen to me. By divine hope, I see what others don't see because, like Abraham, I know the character of God and I know He moves in invisible ways in this world. Knowing that, I then can take action by faith.

We see this lived out in the real world almost weekly in our Tuesday night prayer meetings. Every week, we pray through all the cards you turn in. Some are asking for prayer for someone who is sick. Others are in need of a job. Others are asking for prayer because of trouble in their marriage. But at the same time as we are praying for those needs, there are other cards where people are praising God because they were healed from some sickness or God provided them with a job or they were praising God because He was healing their marriage. That's Divine Hope that "sees" what God is capable of doing, combined with real faith that believes that it will happen to me.

Do you see why we then need hope to stay on God's path? If we don't have the vision of what is possible with God, we'll just stop following Him because we don't understand the kind of a God that He is. But if we have divine hope, we'll know what God is capable of doing and we'll be encouraged to take steps of faith in His direction.

But now, you might be thinking, "Okay pastor, I want to have that kind of hope, but I don't have it. So, how do I get it?" That's what Paul explains in Romans chapter five. He tells us...

III. How to Acquire Divine Hope.

Look at it: Verse 1:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith...

Let me stop there. In the whole of chapter four, Paul describes that Abraham was considered "righteous," not because of his righteous acts but because of his "righteous" faith. In other words, his righteous actions didn't produce faith. His faith produced righteous actions. He quotes Gen. 15:6 which says: (Rom. 4:3)

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

And in verse 23, Paul says this is how it will work for us, as well:

The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (Rom. 4:23, 24)

So, we are made righteous by our faith, not our works.

Now, Paul goes on to say, for those who have put their faith in Christ...

...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1b, 2)

When we say “we are saved by faith,” it doesn’t mean that no action is involved in our salvation. No, what we’re saying is that we are saved by the actions of Christ, not our own actions. His action on the cross is what caused God to forgive our sins. So, our faith is in action, just not OUR action, but HIS action.

This then leads us to “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” We rejoice in Divine Hope when our faith is in the actions of Christ, because now we know what hopeless people in America don’t know. We see what they don’t see. We know that we’re forgiven by God and we have a future, both in this life and after we die. We don’t live in a “giant gutter in outer space.” No, we have a future that is good, satisfying, full of meaning and blessed by God.

Do you have that hope as you sit here today? Do you want that kind of hope? Paul explains how, after you have faith in Christ, you can acquire His hope. He says:

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:3-5)

This is shocking, right? I mean, we’re all thinking, “suffering?” Really? This is the only way to acquire hope? Yeah. It’s the only way to acquire Divine Hope. There’s human hope, but frankly, it’s not good for much. You see, ‘divine hope’ is like the house in Texas that was actually built to hurricane code because the guy built it himself. It looked like the other houses on the block, until Hurricane Ike hit. Then his house was the only one left standing. (show photo) The media came around and said, “It’s a miracle. How did the Hurricane miss your house and wipe out all the others?” He said, “It didn’t miss me. It hit me. But I was ready for it.”

It took that guy longer and it cost him more to build his house to hurricane code. But it was well worth it. Most people want to have emotional and spiritual hurricane insurance or they say, “What are the chances that my life will be hit by a hurricane?” I’d say those chances are hovering right around 100%. Paul is offering you the blueprints for how to build a hurricane-proof life. Here it is.

It begins with suffering. The Greek word means “a pressing, pressure, oppression, affliction, distress.” Why would we rejoice in that? Because we know what it will produce. It produces a chain reaction. Suffering produces perseverance. This word means “patience, endurance, stability.” Do you want that? It is produced by suffering just like physical strength is produced by the pain of exercise.

Next, perseverance produces character. This Greek word literally means “approvedness.” It’s like being certified. Building materials are tested and approved to carry a certain amount of weight or to have a certain strength. Then, every piece produced by that process is stamped as being certified to accomplish that task. So, suffering CAUSES you to be stable under pressure which CAUSES you to be

approved and certified which finally CAUSES you to have hope. And what is hope again? Hope is the vision of what is possible.

Can you believe the photo of that neighborhood in Texas where every house was flattened by the hurricane except one? Do you think that the neighbors might have a new image of what would be possible when they rebuilt their houses?

Why do we need hope?

1. We need divine hope to view this world properly.
2. We need divine hope to stay on God's path.
3. We need divine hope to show the world what life in Christ can do.

Let's pray...

ⁱ Cameron McAlister, "The Glamor of Atheism," *Just Thinking* (June 2014)

ⁱⁱ Tara Parker-Pope, "Suicide Rates Rise Sharply in U.S.," *The New York Times* (5-2-13)