

This Must Be the Place of Hope

Blueprints of a Healthy Church – Part VII

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Someone has said, “We can live forty days without food, eight days without water, four minutes without air, but only a few seconds without hope.”

One author wrote:

- “When we are trapped in a tunnel of misery, hope points to the light at the end;
- When we are overworked and exhausted, hope gives us fresh energy;
- When we are discouraged, hope lifts our spirits;
- When we are tempted to quit, hope keeps us going;
- When we lose our way and confusion blurs the destination, hope keeps us from panic;
- When we struggle with a crippling disease or a lingering illness, hope helps us persevere beyond the pain;
- When we fear the worst, hope brings reminders that God is still in control;
- When we must endure the consequences of bad decisions, hope fuels our recovery;
- When we are forced to sit back and wait, hope gives us the patience to trust;
- When we feel rejected and abandoned, hope reminds us we are not alone;
- When we say our final farewell to someone we love, hope in the life beyond gets us through our grief.

Put simply, when life hurts and dreams fade, nothing helps like hope.”ⁱⁱ

This author went on to write,

“Without hope, prisoners of war languish and die; students get discouraged and drop out of school; athletic teams fall into slumps and continue to lose; writers, longing to be published, run out of determination; addicts return to their habits; marriage partners decide to divorce; inventors, artists, and

entrepreneurs lose their creativity . . . hope plays a vital role in all of life.”ⁱⁱⁱ

If any one thing should characterize the life of the believer, it is hope. If anything should distinguish this church from a thousand others, it is this: this church must be the place of hope.

We are attempting to reach a world that has no hope.

Solomon wrote,

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

I am equally convinced that the world is literally on a mad hunt for hope, though they do not realize it as such, and because they cannot find lasting hope in anything they try, they are literally sick at heart.

The world is trying the latest religious fads; trusting in the promises of gurus and spiritual teachers; hoping in reincarnation; hoping in a religious system of ethics; hoping to prolong life any way possible; playing with one toy after another; indulging in one addiction after another; becoming involved with one partner after another – hoping to dull the pain of a life that is empty of hope.

We have all watched the news reports of the Russian submarine that sunk. An explosion inside crippled it and all the sailors died. Years earlier, another submarine was accidentally rammed by a ship off the coast of Massachusetts. The entire crew was trapped in a prison house of death. Every effort was made to rescue the crew, but all ultimately failed. Near the end of the ordeal, a deep sea diver, who was doing everything in his power to find a way for the crew’s release, thought he heard a tapping on the steel wall of the sub. He placed his helmet up against the side of the vessel and realized it was a message in Morse code. He listened and spelled out in his mind the message that was tapped over and over again: “Is there any hope? Is there any hope? . . .” And there was no answer, because there was no hope.

Our community is asking the question, “Is there any hope? Where will we turn for hope?”

The community must be able to turn here – to this church. And we must be a people dedicated to the message of the gospel, which is the only message of true hope.

Now the word “hope” can be somewhat misleading. Daniel Webster defined “hope” as, “desire accompanied by a belief in fulfillment”. He said, “to hope is to expect with confidence”.

This is an excellent definition that mirrors that of the Greek word “elpis” or “hope”. Over the course of the past week, the more I studied the verses of scripture related to this little Greek word “elpis,” the more convinced I became that hope is not some nice option for a few of us to apply and enjoy. Hope is, in reality, an essential ingredient for our survival – and so much more.

The Church Must Be the Place of Hope

I want to cover a lot of ground today, and read through a lot of scripture on the subject of hope.

1. Hope is a characteristic of God.

Paul wrote in Romans 15:13,

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says that God is the source of hope; the creator and author of hope. However, this hope is also activated in the life of the believer by the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians 1:27, Paul writes,

To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

In other words, hope is a characteristic of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is involved in the creation of and operation of hope.

It is no surprise to learn then, that hope is related to the word of God.

2. Hope is the aftermath of learning and obeying scripture.

Romans 15:4 tells us,

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that

through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Are you in need of hope? The source of encouragement is the book called the Bible.

Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:16-17,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

That word “equipped” was used in Paul’s day to refer to a ship that was fully packed with the necessary goods to set sail on a journey. In other words, we have been given the word of God so that we might be fully loaded with the things we will need for the journey.

My boys went camping this weekend. They went hiking to a waterfall and pitched their tent, along with three other guys. Their guide, who happens to be one of our Student Ministry leaders, gave them a list of items to pack. He divided the list into things they absolutely had to have, like food and matches and a sleeping bag, and things they did not have to have, but would make their camping experience more enjoyable, like a roll of Charmin and eating utensils.

I took the boys to the store and got the stuff they needed. I then helped them pack their gear – which included a tent for four. By the time we were finished packing their backpacks, they easily weighed forty pounds each. During this whole process, the boys never said, “Look, Dad, we don’t need to bring any of this stuff – we’ll just hope to find it along the way. We don’t need any of this heavy food or gear – we’ll just hope for the best!”

They did not just hope they would survive – they packed what they needed. They did not just hope they would not starve – they packed food and utensils. And they even made room for the Charmin.

I was really proud of one of the boys – he somehow managed to squeeze into a side pouch, six chocolate covered doughnuts. I have been such a godly influence!

Paul is saying that the Bible is the gear we need to survive the journey. And when we pack the scriptures, we have just packed enough supply of hope to carry us across the way.

3. Hope is the assurance of salvation.

II Corinthians 1:9-10 says,

Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,

Now most people use the word “hope” as a synonym for wish or desire. However, the biblical use of “hope” is not related to “wishing” or this kind of hoping. The Bible does not even refer to the kind of serious hoping that we do when we say, “I hope I get that job,” or “I hope my child doesn’t have a serious illness,” or “I hope she’ll say, ‘Yes,’ when I propose.”

I said, “I hope it doesn’t rain,” this past week when I washed my truck. Understand that the amount of time I spend washing my truck proportionately affects whether or not it will rain. If I wash the truck only, there is a slight chance of rain. If I wash the truck and dry it off, there is a good chance of rain. If I wash the truck, dry it off, and clean the windows with Windex, there is an excellent chance of sudden rain. If I wash the truck, dry it off, do the windows, and Armor All the tires – by the time I get to the last tire, thunder clouds have formed directly over my house. So I say things like, “I hope it doesn’t rain!”

The biblical use of the word “hope” relates to a fact – it relates to something that God has promised and will fulfill. We are so confident that He will keep His promise that we use the word “hoping” as a synonym for “knowing”. It has not happened yet, but it is a fact that will take place. This is the hope that Paul wrote about to the Corinthians.

The apostle Peter wrote along the same lines in I Peter 1:3-4.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

Skip to I Peter 1:18-19.

knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a

lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

Our hope is assurance of salvation through Christ.

A recent *Reader’s Digest* article told of a sixty-seven year old man named Bill, who had donated over one hundred pints of blood over the years to the Red Cross. No doubt many people owe their lives to this man’s kindness. So why did Bill do it? He answered, “When that final whistle blows, and Saint Peter asks, ‘What did you do that was good?’ I’ll just say, ‘I gave over one hundred pints of blood.’ That ought to get me in.”

If this man was serious, as many are today who think their good deeds will get them into heaven, Bill is trusting in the wrong person’s blood.

Peter said, “We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ; that is, His sacrifice that He made on our behalf.”

It is the blood of Jesus Christ alone that atones for our sins.

If your hope is in you, then you have false hope. The only hope of salvation is found in Christ alone.

4. Hope is a mark of spiritual depth.

In Romans 5:3-5, we are told,

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The reference to the Holy Spirit is appropriate because it is the Spirit of God that produces what we call, the fruit of the Spirit. According to Romans chapter 5, one of the evidences of the Spirit’s work in our lives is the appearance and development of hope! Remember, hope is confidence that God will keep His word.

This leads me to the next observation about hope.

5. Hope is the destroyer of despair.

Psalm 42:5 says,

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.

Skip to Psalm 42:11.

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

6. Hope is the reward for repentance and obedience.

The children of Israel were in Babylonian captivity for disobeying the Lord their God. Yet, in the midst of their suffering, for the sake of their own sinfulness, the Lord made an incredible revelation to them. Jeremiah recorded God's words to them, in Jeremiah 29:10-13.

For thus says the Lord, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.

"For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

"Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."

Are you missing hope today? Is it because you refuse to repent and obey the will of God? Are you disobeying scripture? Are you ignoring your conscience?

I John 3:2-3 tells us,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Hope is enjoyed as a byproduct of pure and holy living.

7. Hope is a key defense against the enemy of our soul.

We are told in I Thessalonians 5:8,

. . . let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

The enemy attacks the mind – so cover your mind with the helmet of hope. This is the helmet of confidence that you belong to God through Christ.

8. Hope is the confidence of eternal life in heaven.

In Titus 3:5-7, we read,

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

One of the distinctives of the believer is his confidence of a future in heaven. This is the reason Paul said that we grieve over the loss of loved ones, but we,

. . . will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. (I Thessalonians 4:13b)

Perhaps you have heard the story of Jim and Roni Bowers. They were traveling in a missionary plane in Peru and were suddenly attacked by a Peruvian military jet. They were literally, without warning, shot down. One bullet passed through the heart of Roni and through their daughter, whom she was holding. Both Roni and Charity were instantly killed. Jim and their son, Cory, were saved as the missionary pilot, although seriously injured, managed to land the plane. Jim and Roni were missionaries with ABWE (Association of Baptists for World Evangelism), which is a missions organization served by many of our global staff. This incident triggered an international reaction. In one news clip, Roni's parents and the grandparents of Charity were interviewed. The surprise in the eyes of the commentator could not be missed, as he heard them say, "It's all right."

Many believers in Thessalonica wanted to know about their deceased family members. So Paul took time and wrote to them, under inspiration, and gave them the hope of God's future plan. Look at I Thessalonians 4:13-17.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until

the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, . . .

This is the only time this word “shout” is used in the New Testament. It is the Greek word “keleuo,” which means, “to command”. Herodotus used the word for the command given to an army. In the same way, the Lord will descend giving commands. I would imagine the first command will be for the dead bodies to come to life and join their immortal spirits. Continue in I Thessalonians 4:16.

. . . with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, . . .

In the days of Paul, trumpets were used to announce the coming of royalty, as well as, again, to signal the charge of an army. Continue to I Thessalonians 4:16b-17.

. . . and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

The believer has hope in the promise of God as it relates to an eternal home in heaven.

9. Hope is the distinctive element of our testimony.

This is true in our personal testimony. Look at I Peter 3:15.

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, . . .

It is also true in our testimony as a church body. Look at Ephesians 4:4-6.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

We have always known that we are under the banner of one Lord and one faith and one baptism, but we are also under the banner of and characterized by one hope.

Conclusion

Turn to Hebrews 10:23-25.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Imagine! The assembly of believers was intended by God to help us overcome hopelessness! The assembly is marked as being a congregation of people who hold fast to their profession of hope!

The church should be known as a house of prayer, a house of worship, and try this one on, a house of hope! And according to Hebrews 10:23-25, hope happens to be contagious. The church is the place where everyone should come down with an incurable case of hope.

This does not mean we paint smiles on our faces and slap everyone on the back with Romans 8:28. This must be a real place, where trials are understood, troubles are listened to, and tears are shed. However, courage in Christ and hope in the promises of God should be clearly encouraged.

Ken Medema, the blind singer and song writer, has a song which speaks of this ingredient of an effective and Spirit saturated fellowship of believers. The song is entitled, “If This Is Not A Place”. Let me read the words.

If this is not a place where tears are understood, then where shall I go to cry?

And if this is not a place where my spirit can take wing, then where shall I go to fly?

I don't need another place for trying to impress you with just how good and virtuous I am;

I don't need another place for always being on top of things, everybody knows that's a sham;

I don't need another place for always wearing smiles, even when it's not the way I feel.

So if this is not a place where my questions can be asked, then where shall I go to seek?

And if this is not a place where my heart's cry can be heard, then where shall I go to speak?

And if this is not a place where tears are understood, where shall I go, oh, where shall I go to cry?ⁱⁱⁱ

The motto of our world is, “Never let them see you sweat.”

The motto of the church is, “Whosoever will may come – sweaty and sinful and troubled and despairing – come all.”

In the war years, triage (sorting out) referred to the policy by which medical assistance was given in makeshift hospitals near the front lines. It was up to the medical staff to “color-tag” the wounded, in order to place them in one of three categories according to their condition. One color-tag meant “hopeless” – nothing would save the soldier. Another color-tag meant “hopeful” – the injured soldier would survive whether they got help or not. The third color-tag meant “doubtful” – the wounded soldier might live if medical assistance was given as soon as possible. Since there were severely limited medical supplies, assistance was given only to this last group.

One soldier, named Lou, was badly blown apart, including one leg that was severely wounded. The doctor who examined him made the decision that Lou was a hopeless case, and tagged him as such. This basically meant that he was leaving him to die. However, a nurse noticed Lou was conscious and began talking with him. They discovered they were both from Ohio. Getting to know Lou as a person, the nurse just could not let him die. She slipped into the ward that night, when everyone was sleeping, and changed his color-tag from hopeless to doubtful. Because of that, the next morning, Lou was taken in the back of a truck to a better medical facility where he spent several months. He lived – all because a nurse broke the rules of triage and changed his tag, which gave him another chance at life.

The church must be the place where tags are changed. The mission of the church is to enter the triage centers of the world and give people a chance at life – through the liberating, hope-filled gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps today, this is exactly what you need. You need your tag changed:

- from unbeliever to believer;
- from nominal Christian to committed disciple;
- from prayer-less Christian to prayer warrior;
- from stingy believer to generous giver;

- from uninvolved church sitter to involved servant.

Perhaps you are a Christian, but today, you need to change the way you have tagged something. You need to change:

- something you have marked “hopeless”;
- someone you have tagged “unreachable”;
- some past event you have filed as “unforgivable”;
- some deed done to you that you have labeled “unforgettable”.

You cannot have hope and at the same time, refuse to give hope to someone else.

This is what the church is, my friend. We happen to be a company of people who have been given hope by God – and we are now to act like Him and give hope to everyone else.

Sarah Clarke and her husband, many years ago, founded a ministry in downtown Chicago among the homeless, the alcoholics, the abandoned, and the drug addicts. They purchased a building that at one time, had been called the “Pacific Beer Garden”. They dropped the word “Beer” and added the word “Mission,” and became the “Pacific Garden Mission”. They began by printing little invitation cards that would be passed out by the tens of thousands over decades of ministry. That little invitation gave the address of the mission and then simply stated, “Hope for all who enter.”

These words sum up the mission of the church. The church must be a place of hope for all who enter. Then, when someone comes to this place and taps on the side of their sunken vessel that has, as it were, carried them to the bottom of the sea, the words, “Is there any hope? Is there any hope? . . .” we can answer, “Yes! Oh yes! Let us introduce you to the God of hope and the assurance of hope and the motivation of hope and the defense of hope and the word of hope and the perseverance of hope and the eternal confidence of hope in heaven forever.”

This church can be a lot of things, but one thing it must be: this must be the place of hope.

ⁱ Chuck Swindoll, *Hope Again* (Dallas, Texas, Word Publishing, 1996), p. xi.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ David Jeremiah, *Acts of Love*, (Gresham, Oregon, Vision House Publishing, 1994), p. 187.