

The Hope of Belief

November 15, 2020

This morning, we start with a riddle.

- What is like happiness in that you can never get enough?
- What is something that some people would pay any amount of money for?
- What is like time in that it always seems to be in short supply?
- What can be more fleeting than an Arizona snowstorm?
- What can go stale like a piece of bread left on the counter?
- What do you need like oxygen?

Hope.

Some things are true about each of us because, well, we are all human. One of those things is that is true for you and me is that we are powered by hope. What is hope?

Hope is the expectation we put on the our future.

If the schoolmaster of 2020 has taught us anything, our future vision is anything but 2020. The future is not and has not been clear this year. A fog of uncertainty set in and it has not lifted. Who would have guesses:

- Coronavirus: Leading to nationwide shutdown
- Societal Unrest: stemming from George Floyd's death.

- The Presidential Election
- COVID-19 numbers are rising

Questions about the future swirl—

- How long are we going to work from home?
- How long will your kids have school from home?
- How long until you can leave your home?
- Is another lockdown on the horizon?
- Will there be a mask mandate?
- What will the economy be like?

Ladies and Gentlemen, it seems that uncertainty is camped just outside.

If hope is the expectation that we place on the future—how can we place ANY expectations on such an uncertain future?

For a people powered by hope—what are we to do?

It is not enough for us to trot out tired platitudes like,

- Things just have to get better.
- Things could be worse.
- Things will turn out fine.
- Things will be okay.

Hope without a foundation is a fairy tale. We don't hope in fairy tales, but we have every reason to have an enduring, hearty, rugged, life-defining kind of hope.

For a people powered by hope—what are we to do?

We are going to learn today how to find and keep hope.

PROP: Our future is uncertain, our God is not.

We are going to just read one verse, in Romans 15.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

PRAY

Our future is uncertain; our God is not.

Where to find hope

How to keep hope

1. Where to find hope—

1 John 4:8 says, “God is love.”

James 1:17 says, All good comes from God.

But here we see God described as, “the God of all hope.”

Look again at verse 13,

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

In other words, God is the source of all hope. You cannot and must not try to generate your own hope. We must gain our hope from the God of all hope.

How do we try and generate our own hope?

When we look to the future, decide what we want and manufacture an expectation that becomes a hope. And when we manufacture that expectation and place our hope upon it, we are going to begin to get into trouble.

Let me take a step back—

Many of us read this verse—

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

And nod our heads.

But if we were to put this prayer into our own words it would be something more like this—“May God fulfill my hopes so that I can have joy and peace....”

This verse directs us to look to the God of hope.

Do you see the difference?

God I hope.

Is different than

God of hope.

How can you tell the difference?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing...

By what you are trusting in.

The question we have to ask ourselves is:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing...

In believing what?

That God is trustworthy.

It is impossible to hope in someone you do not trust in. The place we find hope is in the God of all hope. And as we trust this God as reliable—the twin cousins of hope show up—joy and peace.

Do you see that?

Each week one of the reasons we gather is to remind ourselves that we can trust in God no matter how thick the fog of uncertainty is around us. We might not be able to see more than a few moments ahead, but he is still the God of all hope.

We need reminders that our God is reliable.

We need reminders our God's promises stand.

We need reminders that we are safe with God.

We need to be reminded that he is our ONLY hope.

I know you will not remember the words I say in this sermon. I know that you don't remember any of the words that I say in nearly ANY sermon. That is why we sing songs that say:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

Refrain:

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

How we need to be reminded that ONLY in the God of all hope can you stand. Nothing else will hold the weight of your hope. Nothing.

This is why we say HOPE follows TRUST.

Trust God.

Why can you trust God?

NOT that you will never experience disappointment.

NOT that you will never suffer hardship.

NOT that you will never face uncertainty.

NOT that you will never lose your job.

NOT that you will never have to quarantine.

You can trust God because he is trustworthy.

He has proven this. To be able to hope in him we must be convinced of his trustworthiness. Is he trustworthy? Yes.

How do you know?

Look no farther than his son.

How trustworthy is our God?

So much.

But don't take my word for it.

Look at his son. His beloved son.

God sent his son to this sin-scarred world and her sin-spoiled people; his only son, his beloved son. God sent that son to be slain as a sacrifice for my sin. For your sin.

This God did not excuse our villainy away—he washed it away with the blood of his dear son. This God did not shrug his shoulders at our treachery—he crushed his beloved son.

This God did not abandon us dead in our sin—he abandoned to die for our sin.

This God did not leave us mired in our despair—he made his son despair.

This is the God of our hopes.

He treated his son as if guilty for your every sin.

But there is no hope in death as a dead end.

This God ALSO raised his son up and overpowered the grave.

Why can we trust this God?

Because of how he treated his son. Our God did not abandon him to be decayed to dust.

This is why we can believe that this God of our is indeed the God of all hope. You might even say that he is the God of all hope ESPECIALLY when things seem hopeless.

You might wonder—What does Jesus and his death and resurrection have to do with this fog of uncertainty that has settled on our country when we don't know—

- How long are we will work from home?
- How long will our kids will have school from home?
- If another lockdown on the horizon?
- If there will there be a mask mandate?
- What will the economy be like?

Great question.

Here is why—we need a hope that does not die at the edge of the grave. I read the sermon of an old forgotten preacher he said,

“If our hope takes us up to the edge of the grave and dies there...it is not Christian hope.” Harold Cooke Phillips

We need to know that our hope has no expiration date.

The God of all hope gives that kind of hope. The hope that you can trust him completely. Because hope follows trust.

Trust God—NOT

- That your husband would change.
- That your wife would listen.
- That your kids would inherit a better world than you did.
- That we won't have to quarantine.

- That our economy will be in good shape.

All of those hopes have an expiration date.

Our HOPE in the God of all HOPE does not.

The resurrection is not just for Easter but it suits all seasons. It would be idiotic to celebrate Christmas if that little baby 'meek & mild' grew up to die and just stay dead.

There is no good in that.

A forever-dead Jesus is worth nothing.

You know why? Because that would mean that all his followers would have no reason to trust the God of all hope.

But today we remember that,

Others laid his body in the tomb; but he got up. There is now a tomb that stands open and its gaping mouth screams, "He is not here; he is risen."

Every bit of concrete hope can trace its roots back to the vacant grave of Jesus Christ. It is a resurrected hope that injects meaning in our lives. All hope we experience comes from that empty tomb.

Hope explodes from the vacant crypt—opening up a trillion wonderful promises.

Not the least of which are: you can trust the God of all hope. We've seen how to find hope—in the God of all hope.

2. How to Keep Hope—

Did you see the point of the prayer? Look again at verse 13,

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

So that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

How do we abound in hope?

By the power of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, it is not enough just to gain a new perspective we must NOT just have help power from the very Spirit of God. This means you and I lack the strength to do this on our own.

By the power of the Holy Spirit does not mean anything mysterious or vague.

What we are saying here is that each of us must have the settled conviction that not only can we not manufacture our own hope—it comes from the God of all hope—but also we

cannot keep our own hope. It must come from the Spirit of God.

How are we to respond?

How are we to look through this fog of uncertainty?

Hope follows trust—Trust God.

Trust God enough to let determine what you hope in. You and I cannot determine our hopes. We are woefully bad at that. We will pick the wrong things.

Some unworthy hopes:

- That your husband would change.
- That your wife would listen.
- That your kids would inherit a better world than you did.
- That we won't have to quarantine.
- That our economy will be in good shape.

Rather we must rely on the God of all hope—who wants us to abound in hope.

Some worthy hopes—

- God and his plan

Some of us just need to understand that his plan is not our plan. You can trust he has a plan for you and will work in you.

And you can trust that it won't be in the way you think makes sense.

If God only worked in our lives in ways that we expected, then God would be limited to limits of our expectations. Is that a god you want to serve? No. Boo/hiss to that god.

I want to serve the God of all hope—not the one who always does what I hope.

Some of us need to come to terms with the fact that his plan for you is not your plan for you. That is hard.

But we need to realize that his plans are better than ours.

He says he promises

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—Is. 64:4

Listen, I understand that none of us have been this way before. These Times of uncertainty are an invitation of us to hope in him.

God rarely works in ways that we expect. Maybe for you it is through—

- A spouse you don't understand
- A child who seems distant

- A life that seems out of control
- A child that has school at home
- A mask mandate

The future is uncertain.

Our God is not.

We started with a riddle—we end with one.

What is God going to do?