

## ***Hope Restored Sermon*** **April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018**

Wow, that has to have been one of the most beautiful lead ins to a sermon I've preached. It's easy to get caught up in the beauty of Christine's dance and miss the message. So, let me remind you of the core of the message of that song.

*"Are you hurting and broken within? Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Jesus is calling. Have you come to the end of yourself? Do you thirst for a drink from the well? Jesus is calling. O come to the altar. The Father's arms are open wide."*

That's a powerful message that many in our world today need to hear and receive. We saw the reality of that over the last 2 nights at our Hope Restored outreach event. Over the past two nights we had the privilege of praying with individuals who were hurting and broken for several reasons.

- A teenager who's step-father was killed
- Another teenager asked for prayers for his family after his 92 year old grandmother passed away last week and they don't know if she's with the Lord or not.
- Another young man asked for prayers for peace and protection for his family after his father tried unsuccessfully to kill their mother.
- Another young man is deeply disturbed and concerned by the rampant gun violence in our country.

That's just a small sample size from a handful of people. But multiply that across the 325 million people in the U.S. or the 7 billion people in the world and you've got millions of people living with brokenness and hopelessness who desperately need some kind of hope to grab a hold off that won't let them down. But sadly, much of what people have based their hope on repeatedly lets them down. And that's not a new phenomenon. It's been that way practically since the beginning. And this sense of hopelessness was rampant 3,000 years ago on the Sunday after Jesus had been crucified 3 days earlier.

Prior to Jesus' death many people were filled with hope that He was the long awaited Messiah. But on that fateful afternoon, their whole worlds were turned upside down as Jesus was brutally beaten and nailed to a cross to die. Many had to be crying out in desperation – how could this happen? How could we have been so wrong after being so sure that Jesus was the one we'd waited for all these years? And some had hoped that this was just a bad dream that they 'd soon wake up from or others holding on to hope that maybe Jesus would do yet one more miracle and miraculously resuscitate from his grave. But it was a long held Jewish belief that after 3 days in a tomb, a person's spirit left the body permanently and therefore on that Sunday morning 3 days had passed and there was no hope of a miraculous resuscitation. It was obvious to everyone on that Sunday morning that this was just one more burst bubble of hope in a long series of burst bubbles.

This bitter disappointment was expressed quite well by the **men on the road back home to Emmaus**. Apparently they'd been hanging around for 3 days waiting for Jesus to perform one more miracle and somehow rise from the tomb. But on that Sunday morning they were heading back home and they mistook Jesus for a visitor who was unaware of how recent events had dashed so many hopes and dreams. In trying to explain it to Jesus they said:

**Luke 24:19-24 (NIV)** *About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."*

Now, wouldn't you assume that if the angel told the women that Jesus had risen from the grave, and they believed it, that they would stay around Jerusalem and check it out? But clearly they didn't believe the women's report. Their assessment of the whole situation can pretty well be summarized in their statement, "*we had hoped.*" That 3 word assessment could be used by many today to describe their lives: "*I had hoped.*" It indicates that once you'd hoped but no longer. For whatever reason, that hope is long gone and now I'm giving up on hope and going back to my normal mundane life and living without hope. Perhaps that's an accurate description of your life or the life of someone you know.

The men on the road to Emmaus weren't alone in their dashed hopes that Sunday morning. **John and Peter** would have also been members of the "**dashed hope**" club that morning. Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb to hopefully anoint Jesus' corpse but instead found it empty. So, she ran and told Peter and John that Jesus' body was missing. Peter and John sprinted to the tomb and saw just what Mary had found and their response was the same as Mary's, one of continued disappointment and heartache. The nightmare of the past 3 days was continuing. John records what they did next: "*We went back to our homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying*" (John 20:10). It's over – we might as well go back to our lives prior to Jesus.

**Mary Magdalene's life** had been so dramatically changed by her encounters with Jesus that her grief was almost overwhelming. She had personally experienced God's love and compassion and grace and forgiveness and now Jesus was not only dead – but now someone has taken his body – the pain and suffering just won't end. And so, she doesn't know what else to do but stay there and cry. But then in her grief she looks into the tomb once again and this time she sees two angels who ask her why she's crying so much. She says, "*They have taken my Lord away,*" she said, "*and I don't know where they have put him.*" (John 20:13). At this point she turns away from the angels and sees who she thinks is the gardener and asks him if he's the one who's stolen Jesus' body. And she says, "*if you're the one, just tell me where you put his body and I'll go get him.*" She's so desperate to pay her last respects to Jesus' corpse. But then Jesus simply says, "**Mary**" and once she hears her name spoken by Jesus himself, as she's no doubt heard many times before, she realizes that this is actually Jesus in the flesh, not lying dead in a grave, but standing before her – that she's overcome with shock, excitement and joy and her hope is restored upon seeing the resurrected Jesus.

Consider **Peter**, who had to have been filled with overwhelming sorrow – but in addition to everyone else – he had to have also been burdened with tremendous guilt over denying Jesus 3 times and the third time he met eyes with Jesus as he was being led across the courtyard. As far as Peter knew, the last time his eyes looked into Jesus' eyes were when he had just finished doing what he had sworn to Jesus, before all the other apostles, that he would never do. But that lost hope was restored when Jesus appeared in person just to Peter and then on the sea shore later he reinstates Peter as a leader of His flock of followers.

Fast forward 30 years and Peter, who is in the last years of his life writes some powerful words to a group of Christians who are undergoing persecution for their faith. Perhaps they are wondering if this commitment is worth the sacrifice. And to them Peter writes these amazing words filled with hope. And remember, as I read these words that they were flowing from an individual who at one time was living with broken dreams, a broken heart and shame for turning his back on Jesus. But now 30 years later he writes the words of encouragement talking about the hope that all Christians should have.

### **Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.**

I love that phrase, "**living hope**". As I've mentioned earlier in the sermon, this type of hope is what so many of us want and need in our lives to continue on living with a sense of purpose and meaning. When a person loses "hope" they also often lose the reason to wake up and live each day with meaning and purpose. And so several questions arise out of this text.

#### **1. Where does this living hope come from?**

The answer to that question is two fold:

- First it comes from **God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. It doesn't come from a promotion or from possessions or from winning the lottery etc. It originates and is given to us by God. That same God who was responsible for raising Jesus from that grave, to which Mary and Peter and John and the men on the road to Emmaus and over 500 others were living testimonies to.
- Also, **it flows out God's mercy** – which is God not giving us what our sins deserve. Because of our many sins, we deserve God's judgment and condemnation, but Jesus took all of that upon Himself when he died on the cross and so God poured out all of His righteous wrath on Jesus instead of us.
- And instead, we **receive God's grace** – which is **a gift we didn't deserve**. The text says, that God has given us (that's grace) a “new birth”. Earlier in Jesus' ministry he had a private meeting at night with **Nicodemus**. And he told Nicodemus that in order to get into the kingdom of God you needed to be born again. This is the decision each of us needs to make where we turn the control of our lives over to God. We admit that we can't do it on our own and we want God to take control. And God does an amazing thing – He replaces our sinfulness with Christ's righteousness and puts into each of us His indwelling presence in the person of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit begins to transform our whole being (our thoughts and attitudes which then flows out into our actions). We become increasingly more and more Christ like in everything we do and say and think. I saw that clearly the past two nights as we were wrapping up the Hope Restored event and talking about what transpired. And on more than one occasion as were talking about our experiences interacting with people who needed hope in their lives, tears began to well up in people's eyes. What's that about. It's about people who are living in their hope in Jesus and so want others to experience that living hope as well. Their hearts are becoming so much bigger and so much more like Jesus and as they do, they want what Jesus wants. And what Jesus wants is a relationship with all of His children. This reaction to the pain of others isn't something you somehow crank out on your own but it occurs as the Holy Spirit transforms your heart to be like Jesus' heart. And you discover your heart becoming much more tender and compassionate than ever before.
- This living hope **springs from the resurrection of Jesus**. It would be impossible for us to have any kind of hope if Jesus was still lying in a tomb somewhere. According to the apostle Paul's assessment if that was the case, *“we above all men should be most pitied.”* (1 Cor. 15:19) But that isn't the case. Jesus did rise from the grave and we are bursting with living hope. And as a result of that we have meaning and purpose for each and every day. We're not just trying to get by every day but we live as more than conquerors because Jesus conquered death and we look forward to that one day as well. As followers of Jesus Christ we don't have to fear death – in fact, in this passage our hope looks forward to what happens after our death.

## **2. What is this living hope?**

In verse 4 Peter says that it's tied to our inheritance. And this isn't just any inheritance that could be lost depending upon how I behave or upon how the person giving us our inheritance does in this life. You see, you might be listed in someone's will as receiving a large percentage of what they leave behind when they die. But if that person dies with no assets but only large debt, then that's what you might inherit. But Peter says this inheritance comes from God who never loses His riches. He describes this inheritance as *never perishing, spoiling or fading*. And I absolutely love the reassurance Peter gives us next concerning this inheritance. He says that it's being “kept in heaven for you.” Meaning no one is ever going to steal your inheritance because it's God that's guarding it and no one overcomes God.

But also it says (in verse 5) that by our faith we're being *“shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”* This is unbelievable. Not only do we actually deserve God's judgment and condemnation. But God instead, offers us an incredible inheritance in heaven one day and God's guarding that inheritance and He's also protecting you from falling away from your inheritance. God's going to do everything He can possibly do to absolutely insure that His children live strong hope filled lives. He is so for you and so wants you to receive your inheritance and He's committed to doing whatever it takes to make sure that happens. Isn't that amazing. That is such a hope filled statement and promise.

### 3. What effect does this living hope have on us?

Look at verse 6. He says that the result of having this living hope is that two, seemingly contrasting things, are happening in your life at the same exact time. He says that they *greatly rejoice while suffering*. Often we think that once God relieves my suffering, then I can rejoice. But Peter says to us and to those who were currently undergoing persecution that it's entirely possible to suffer and rejoice in the Lord *simultaneously*. You certainly didn't see this happening right after Jesus' death on the cross. The disciples were hiding in a secret room for fear of the authorities. They were fearful that they might be next to be arrested and crucified. But after Jesus' resurrection they were unstoppable. They praised God right after they were arrested and beaten and told not to preach about the resurrected Christ anymore – they turned around and thanked God for letting them be persecuted for His sake and asked for more power and more persecution so that they could continue to praise God. You see them praising God from prisons. At one point Paul is drug outside of the side, stoned and left for dead, but God gave him strength and he went right back into the city and continued to preach Christ. You see when you understand that your inheritance isn't contingent on you living a pain free, trouble free life here but is actually received upon your death or Christ coming back, then the pain and suffering in this world takes on a whole new perspective. For followers of Christ – death is actually a promotion because then you receive your inheritance, which is lots of things, but most of all it's living in the physical presence of God Himself. At that point you won't have to wonder what it was like for Elijah or Moses to encounter God in tucked away in the cleft of a rock, you'll experience it first hand. As an old hymn stated quite well: “at that moment, when you come into the presence of God – *“the things of this earth will grow strangely dim – in the light of His glory and grace.”*”

A second aspect of this effect this living hope has on us is expressed in verse 7.

*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Peter is explaining that one of the effects of sufferings or persecutions is that it purifies your faith. It actually makes it stronger. Gold is put under extreme heat so that the impurities might rise to the surface and then removed. Similarly when you go through sufferings it can reveal things about you that the easy life won't ever reveal. You can tell a lot about a person when they encounter suffering. It can reveal struggles with anger, or hidden idols in their life (perhaps the idol of comfort) and God can use those times of suffering to reveal those things to us and allow us to get rid of some of those idols or attitudes and our faith actually grow through those times. And then our text says, that the result of that purification is that it will result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Let me ask you – who's doing the praising and glorying and honoring? Is it you when Jesus appears again? I think it's actually Jesus, God and all of heaven. When Jesus is revealed and you stand before God you'll be basked in praise, glory and honor by none other than God, Jesus and the angels because of how you've allowed sufferings to refine and strengthen your faith.

If you don't believe that interpretation listen to 1 Corinthians 4:5

**1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV)** *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.*

Isn't this incredible. God gives us this living hope through our faith in Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. And God has this great inheritance waiting for us and He's working everyday to make sure that we stay strong in this life and receive what we've been promised. And part of the of the process of making us stronger in our faith is that God brings challenges and allows sufferings into our lives to grow our faith. So, sufferings aren't punishment from God but is actually part of His refining and keeping process. And when we eventually get to see Jesus – all of heaven will erupt in praise, honor and glory over our arrival.

Peter ends with what ought to be the take away from our correct understanding of all of this.

**1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV)** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

All of this is almost too good to be true. It's unbelievable that God would give us all of this. We are in the process of God refining us and preparing us to receive our inheritance. And so our lives ought to be lived with great excitement and gratitude because our salvation is happening right now every single day that God uses your life to prepare you for living in His presence one day. "Salvation" is much more than merely going to heaven to live forever. "Salvation" means to restore to what something was originally meant to be. And you were meant and designed by God to live in relationship with Him. And He's now in the process of making that a reality in your and my life.

The song that "**O Come to the Altar**" that Christine danced to has this offer in the words.

*"Are you hurting and broken within?  
Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin?  
Jesus is calling.  
Have you come to the end of yourself?  
Do you thirst for a drink from the well?  
Jesus is calling.  
Oh come to the altar.  
The Father's arms are open wide.  
Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.  
Leave behind your regrets and mistakes.  
Come today there's no reason to wait.  
Jesus is calling.*

**Invitation:**

We're going to be singing together this song as we close our service today. And perhaps there's someone here today that God has been speaking to for quite some time now. Perhaps life hasn't worked out the way you dreamed it would. And maybe your hopes have been shattered as a result. God is offering to you this morning to change your life by accepting Him and allowing Him to replace your brokenness with healing and your hopelessness with a living hope and give you an inheritance that will always be awaiting your arrival into your heavenly and eternal home. If that's something you'd like to do today I invite you to come forward during the singing of this song.