

HOPE FOR OUR TIMES

“Knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

Romans 5:3-4

Hope in the midst of trials and tribulations

Hope in the midst of addictions and finding a solution

Hope in the midst of brokenness

Hope for a better tomorrow when our today seems bleak

You don't have to look far to find cause for worry today. As jobs disappear, as our retirement plans shrivel, anxiety is knitting brows everywhere, and doctors as well as hospitals are seeing more and more people with many symptoms of illness. **No** one is spared the worry, the stress and anxiety, including at times my own.

Part of our worry comes from the fact that most Americans aren't used to it! We've had relatively little to worry about in life.

In fact, in order to relieve our worries we return to our “yesteryears,” we look for “Happy Days” and the Fonz. (As a side note, a family member this summer said to me: “I don't believe what I saw on TV the other day. An older man pitching for “reverse mortgage” or some other product. I looked closely and was able to identify him as the guy who had played the Fonz on happy days” Henry Winkler

Even when we want to go back there, something slams us to the reality – there's no going back!.

Sure, these are hard times, but this is not the Great Depression. And while the nightly news gives us cause to bemoan the loss of moral absolutes in society, Christians have always found themselves—and will always find themselves—living in the midst of a depraved culture... that keeps us, keeping on! Amen!

But no matter how dark a place or an age in time, God has never allowed the light of the Church to be extinguished. Plagues, persecutions, poverty—Christians have lived victoriously in the midst of it all. How? They had something we've lost: a Christian ethic of hope.

Sadly, people have either trivialized or politicized the word *hope*. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines hope as “the feeling that . . . events will turn out for the best.” But a Christian hope isn't a feeling. And it's not wishful thinking. Hope comes from the **CERTAINTY of God's promises**. These are promises like Romans 8:28— “**God works in all things for the good of those who love him.**” How is a cancer victim first diagnosed, a young employee dismissed from work, a young to be first-time mother who loses the baby, the innocent mother, father, son, daughter who is killed in an accident or shooting. How dare anyone of us say that God works in all things for the good...

Promises like Acts 16:31—“**Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.**” Saved from what, if I cannot even get rid of the cancer afflicting the children in St. Jude's hospital and many other places around the world? How can I comfort the mother of the young High School cheerleader, 16 years young who in the middle of a game collapsed and died? That's not supposed to happen.

Promises abound for us about future realities. God has promised believers that Christ will come again, will redeem our bodies, will make us holy, will let us share in His glory, and will give us eternal life. This isn't simple optimism. And it isn't hope pinned to a fallible human leader. This is a firm hope in the Creator.

When we don't have a secure hope, we worry excessively about the future. But when our hope is secure, we are free to live in the fruits of hope.

John Piper has identified four fruits of Christian hope. First, Christian hope bears the fruit of true joy. Unlike happiness, joy is not dependent upon circumstances. Second, Christian hope produces sacrificial love. When we aren't obsessing over self-preservation, we are free to give ourselves to others. Third, Christian hope yields boldness. Fourth, the hopeful Christian is realistic about the reality of the world's problems, but it is also certain of God's ultimate victory.

That's why Christian hope has produced bold men and women who've given their lives to missionary service, or heroes like William Wilberforce who've been willing to sacrifice career, property or popularity for Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-4

In these troubling times, have you ever wondered if we can really be hopeful about the future?

I want to assure you that it is possible to live with hope, despite what may be going on around us.

Because while hope is ultimately about the future, it's also about the present. And that's because we have a living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have hope. It's because He lives that hope can reside in your heart if you're a Christian. What if you are not a Christian, what then?

All you have to do is to accept Jesus as found in John 3. No need to be religious, but a great need to believe in Him as your savior.

And because of that, there is no need to fear the future! God has a master plan, because He is the Master Builder. For each

of us, He has a Blue Print. With certainty I can say: believe that you are a child of God, you are chosen and called by Him. You're not an accident, an afterthought, or a mistake. You have been in the heart and mind of God forever, and He has already been planning and preparing your future.

In fact, God knows the end from the beginning... and everything else in your life. That's comforting when we face tough times and when we're tempted to give up. It's encouraging to know that we are never, ever without hope! So today, if you're tempted to give up on your marriage, don't! If you're thinking about giving up on your kids, don't! If you want to give up on your dreams... or even life itself... don't! Remember that you have a living hope that is working in your past, your present, and your future. And as the Scripture teaches us in Romans chapter 5, that hope does not disappoint!

TODAY AND ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE IN CHRIST, GIVE GOD THANKS FOR KEEPING YOUR FUTURE IN HIS HANDS!

Finally, Christian hope bears the fruit of endurance. When setbacks come—and they do—Christians who have their eyes fixed firmly on God's promises can continue in the good fight. They can press on because they know that their actions aren't in vain. Christ will have the ultimate victory.

Sure, these are tough times. But when we grab hold of the hope we have in Christ, we WILL be able to live with the joy, the sacrificial love, the boldness, and the endurance we will need to face the challenges before us.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13

How many times have you asked someone a question about something important and their response is, “I hope so?”

Imagine asking the following and getting that response:

Is it going to rain today? I hope so?

Did you make a good grade on the test? I hope so?

Did the mechanic really fix my flat tire? I hope so!

In this context, hope doesn't sound very promising. We often use the word hope to express our uncertainty, longing, or a wishful expectation. However, this definition is quite contrary to the hope spoken of in the Bible.

Hope in God is essential for our journey through life on this earth. Without this spiritually centered hope, there is desperation. Without hope, there is pessimism. Without hope, there is no peace. On the contrary, with hope in God there is certainty. With hope there is excitement about the future. With hope there is a glorious eternity waiting. Hope, as described in the New Testament, means “It is a certainty!” not “I hope so.” Hope in God has been prevalent throughout the stories in this book. It is so important to have hope in the Lord, knowing that in good times or bad, He will provide for our needs. He will feed us when we're hungry. He has the power to rescue us from our darkest prison. He may even heal us when we're sick (if it's His will).

Godly hope makes the barren woman believe she can one day conceive.

It assures the follower of Christ that the God Most High hears his prayer.

It causes us to believe that no one is beyond His reach and love.

Hope knows a better day is coming, and preparing for it.

Who/What could possibly be a better source of hope than God? He gives us many reasons to put total confidence and trust in Him: “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified... for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.**” (Deut.31:6) God keeps His word.

Yet sometimes it's still so tempting to lose hope. It starts as a creeping feeling of fear that maybe things are going to turn out right. Have you had this feeling? It's not a fun place to be, is it? Why is God taking so long to act? Why won't He help us now? Maybe it's because He is using the difficult experiences of life to draw us closer to Him. The book of Romans tells us “... 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, who He has given us.” (Rom. 5:3-6)

Do you see how crucial hope is? The Holy Spirit, out of the love of God, gives it to us. We will not be disappointed in having the blessed hope in Him. He will always be with those who have put trust in Him, now and forever.

So you have a choice. You can put your hope in your possessions, which will be useless at your death. You can put your hope in other people, who will inevitably disappoint and fail to deliver.

You can put your hope in other religions, whose gods are not alive.

Or you can put your hope in the only Person who ever died for your sins and then defeated death so that you could too. Hope in God does not disappoint