

O, THAT WE MIGHT BE A PEOPLE FILLED WITH THE DARING POWER OF BIBLICAL HOPE

Part one - Teaching #1239 - Sunday, January 18th, 2009, 10:00 a.m.
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FULL ASSURANCE OF HOPE TO THE END

Hebrews 6:11-12 - "And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Hebrews 10:22-23 - "...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

Hebrews 11:1 - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Romans 4:18-22 - "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." [19] He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. [20] No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, [21] fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. [22] That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.'"

Notice that wonderful phrase that forms the title of this teaching, "full assurance of hope until the end" (**Hebrews 6:11**). Most of the time, we don't link the words *assurance* and *hope* together in our thinking. They feel more like *opposites* than *partners*. We use the word *hope* to express the idea of a *longing* or *desire* rather than a *certainty*.

So the first thing we need to do is establish exactly what we mean when we use the word *hope*. I think we use the word in at least three different ways:

* **First, hope is the desire for something good in the future.** This is perhaps its most common usage. The child says, "I hope daddy gets home early from work today so we can shoot some baskets." In other words, the child has this desire for the future (that his dad will come home early tonight) so that something good will happen (they will shoot baskets together before supper).

* **Second, hope is also the good thing we are desiring in the future - the object of our desire itself.** Parents may say, "Our hope is that our son Jim will arrive safely from Africa." In other words, Jim's safe arrival is the *object* of their hope.

* **Third, hope is also used to describe the reason or the means by which something good can come to pass.** How many times I've been out golfing and am anxious to break forty on the back nine. But golf is a lot like life in that things don't always go the way you would like. I can't count the number of times I've stood on the last tee and said to somebody, "My only hope is to get a three on this last par five!" My hope - some would call it a dream - is for that magical three. The hope is the *means* of reaching the goal of breaking forty.

Those are the most common ways we use the word hope in our everyday speech. And there's nothing wrong with any of them. Each of those is used at some time or another in the Scriptures. And each one is perfectly correct as far as English usage goes. But here's the most important point to remember this morning. **The most important feature of biblical hope is not present in any of those uses.** In fact, the *distinctive feature* of biblical hope is almost the opposite of each of them. Let me explain:

In each of those examples I have just given, the use of the word *hope* expresses *uncertainty* rather than *certainty*. The child *hopes* daddy will come home early from work. He's not sure that

he will. It is the parent's **hope** that Jim will arrive safely from Africa. They aren't absolutely certain he will. My only **hope** for a below forty score on the back nine is to shoot three on the last hole.

In each of these cases - and especially the last - hope is expressing **desire** rather than **certainty**. In other words, we usually use hope to mean, "**My fingers are crossed!**" And there's nothing wrong with using hope in that way in much of our every day living. We all hope for - desire - wish for - certain good things in our future. And that's all right, just so long as we **don't** carry that kind of thinking over into the way the Bible, and the New Testament in particular, centers our faith in the concept of **hope**.

A biblical definition of hope would be quite different. A biblical definition of hope would be "**a confident expectation of the good Father God has for us in the future based on the certainty of His character and promise.**" So Biblical hope not only **desires** the good for the future, it **expects** it. And it not only **expects** it, it is **confident** about it. It is **certain** it will come to pass.

Let me take these introductory remarks a little further. I know these comments aren't traditionally sermonistic, and I won't do this every week, but I want to lay down some foundational concepts that will undergird all of the passages we will study in future weeks.

If Biblical hope is certain hope, **where does this certainty come from?** Where do we get this confidence? In fact, **where does certainty come from generally?** I mean, what makes us **certain** about anything? I think we can answer that on different levels.

First, there are certain facts that operate under visible laws and formulas. If you have two apples and I give you two more, you will have four apples. Only an infant or mentally unstable person would deny it. We can all be **certain** of this because we can count the apples.

Second, there are certain things that we know for certain because they follow basic laws of logic. We don't always think all of the steps through, but we all use these rules every day we breathe. All mortals die. Don Horban is mortal. Therefore, Don Horban will die. We are all certain of those kinds of logical truths.

But there's a **third** kind of certainty that doesn't fit into either one of those categories. We are all aware of a kind of certainty that doesn't come from mathematical calculations or the laws of logic. **There's a kind of certainty that comes from experience and relationship.**

For example, let's say I come to you and say that tonight, at 6 o'clock, all of the Muslims on planet earth are going to convert to Christianity. And starting tonight, at 6 o'clock, all of the sellers of smut and pornography are going out of business because men will suddenly learn to control all lustful desires. And starting tonight, at six o'clock, there will never be another cruel or deceptive word spoken again.

No, it's not about the Second Coming of Jesus. People are just suddenly going to realize the wickedness of their ways and turn from all wrong doing.

Now, philosophic mind games aside, almost everyone here would say, **No way, pastor Don, it's not going to happen. Impossible. In fact, I'm absolutely certain that this will not happen!** And so am I. But please notice something. There's no one in this room who could **prove** that this will not happen. I mean, there is no mathematical law **preventing** this from happening. There's no way you could **prove** that this could never happen. Yet we're all **certain** it won't happen.

Now here's my question. **Where does that certainty come from?** What makes us so sure? This is not an irrelevant question. It all relates to that **third kind of certainty** that comes from **experience** and **relationship** that I mentioned earlier. We all know what people are like. We know from our own hearts. We know from watching the news at night. We know from a thousand and one ways that we recognize and are aware of what is in the heart of man. And so, we're all

certain that this six o'clock prediction is untrue, though we could never **"prove it"** on a blackboard.

So let me turn now to the Scriptures to give some Biblical definitions of the hope we have as Christian people:

1) **GOD** **BIBLICAL HOPE IS ALWAYS TIED TO THE UNFAILING CHARACTER AND PROMISE OF**

Hebrews 10:23 - "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

We hold on to hope because God is faithful. Not only is He faithful, He has **proven** Himself to be faithful. We have a **recorded history** of His faithfulness. In other words, His faithfulness extends beyond **our own perceived experience** of His faithfulness. We have a much **less subjective** measurement of the faithfulness of Almighty God.

We **"hold fast"** our confession - even (and especially) when it doesn't **look** or **feel** like God is being faithful to us at the moment because we have a genuinely inspired, historically truthful record of the nature and actions of our faithful God. The Bible ties our **hope in God** to the solid peg of Biblical truth. Our hope is not **finger crossing**. It is not **wishful thinking**. It's not biting your lip as you sit in the stands while the field goal kicker tries to split the uprights from the fifty yard line. No. Biblical hope is rooted to two foundational realities:

a) **First, it is tied to our knowledge of God's character and action as recorded in His inspired Word.** This is especially true in the record of Jesus' death and resurrection. God has demonstrated His love and His faithfulness. We'll talk about that more in coming weeks.

b) **Second, our hope is tied to our relationship to God through a personal experience of Jesus Christ as the risen Lord.** In fact, this is exactly the way the Apostle Peter describes the whole experience of being **"born again"** - **1 Peter 1:3** - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be **born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...."

Peter makes such an important point here. This hope is not the result of **positive thinking**. You may be an **optimistic** person without Jesus Christ. You may be the kind of person who always likes to walk on the **"sunny side of the street."** You may have a good self-image and be generally positive to be around. You can have a good outlook on life.

Now here's the really important point. **None** of that has anything to do with Biblical hope. Biblical hope is **not** the same as inward optimism. It is **not** the same as a positive outlook. It has nothing to do with self-esteem or self-confidence. Atheists can be **positive**. They can never **possess** Biblical hope.

In fact, one Biblical mark of the fallen mind is it is woefully unaware that is it **"without hope"** in this world. Remember, a person may be very **positive** and still be **without hope** - **Ephesians 2:12** - "....remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope** and without God in the world."

Biblical hope - hope for eternal life and hope for a heart pleasing to God the Father - is only available to those who have **personally experienced the saving grace and life of the Risen Christ**. That's why the Bible says people without Jesus are, very literally and very accurately - **"without hope."**

2) **BIBLICAL HOPE IS THE FUEL FOR BOTH FAITH AND HOLINESS**

Notice again how tightly faith and hope are sewn together in the opening verses of this message:

Hebrews 6:11-12 - “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

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I think you can see that, in fact, the link between faith and hope is so tight - especially in the passage about Abraham - that it’s impossible to distinguish between the two. You just can’t talk about one without the other. They’re like heads and tails on the same coin. What was it that saved Abraham? His faith or his hope in God for the future? You can’t make that distinction in this passage.

That’s because the two are so closely related. Perhaps we could differentiate between them like this - and even this isn’t perfect - **Hope** is faith looking down the road ahead. And **faith** is hope looking back on the faithful character of God. And the only reason I zeroed in on **hope** in this series, rather than **faith**, is I want to look at the future more than the past. But our look at the future in hope is always dependant on our understanding of God’s faithfulness in the past - especially in His powerful redemptive work in Jesus Christ and His death and Resurrection. Let’s wrap up today’s teaching by looking at how hope fuels both **faith** and **holiness**:

a) ***Hope fuels faith by focussing life on the promised future of blessing God has for His children.***

What I’m saying is this. To derail the power of my faith, the devil’s primary method is to **cool my Christian hope - my passion for the future God has prepared for me**. He delights to pull my mind into the **myopic** rather than the **grand panorama** of God’s eternal kingdom perspective. Or think of it this way. The Devil’s primary plan is to draw my whole being into things that will only take place in the next fifty years. He never takes any of us beyond that.

The devil’s main tactic for diminishing the vitality of faith in my life isn’t to cause me to **deny** that I believe the things I believe. There’s a much more successful method than that. Rather than cause me to deny the reality of spiritual truth, he tries to get my life so **absorbed in the cares and demands of the present that I simply ignore rather than deny spiritual concerns**.

God’s plan, on the other hand, is to raise up a peculiar people who **live each moment of this present life, guided and governed by the reality of a future day of reward and blessing**.

That’s why, in all of those opening verses, whenever the writer talks about keeping **faith**

alive, he **always** stirs up the people to focus on their **hope**. That's because planting our heart firmly into our eternal **hope** isn't just **one** way to keep the sizzle in our faith. It's the **only** way.

You can see this reminder throughout the great book of Hebrews: **Hebrews 9:24 and 28** - "**For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf....9:28....so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.**"

Then these words:

Hebrews 10:19-25 - "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

_____ "**Hold fast the confession of our hope**"(23). What is our hope? Well, the hope is just what the writer has been talking about in the preceding verses. Jesus didn't just die. He rose from the dead. And He passed on into heaven itself. And He went as our forerunner. And He's coming back.

And then the writer says I'm to go to church with something pushing everything else out of my mind. I'm to see that day "**drawing near**"(25). That means I'm to see everything else fading and ending. I'm to **tell myself this** as I enter into the sanctuary. I'm to see **the day of Jesus' appearing "Drawing near"** That means I'm to see it **pressing in - racing into my present life. "Bring that day close!"** says the writer.

If I don't do this I will never make God important enough. I'll try to just attach Him to my present plans and ambitions. I'll still say I love God, but there will be nothing **urgent** in it.

But not only does hope fuel **faith**, it fuels **holiness**:

b) **Hope makes holiness a pleasure rather than a chore.** Look at the words from Hebrews again: **Hebrews 6:11-12** - "**And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**"

"**So that you may not be sluggish....**" Is that not a great sentence? How many Christians does that describe? If hope loses its grip on your mind and heart, you're going to get **sluggish** in the delight of your soul. It's not that you won't move ahead at all. You probably won't curse God and die. But you will have lost something precious described in our text - "**....so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises**"(6:12). Hope lets you stand for Christ with **patience**. You keep your sense of **balance**. You aren't constantly **swept off your feet**. You can keep your spiritual head. **You last. And your joy lasts.**

Remember, we're looking now at how hope fuels faith and **holiness**. Let me try to show specifically how hope creates joy in holiness:

When I'm called to **forgive** rather than **retaliate** when I suffer wrong from others, **the**

strength to absorb personal injustice comes from the reservoir of hope. I know that God will make all wrongs right. I know that one day God will reward me for every persecution for His sake. I know that He knows all of the details.

I can forgive because I am filled with the power of hope - Romans 12:17-19 -
“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Do you see it? My confidence in that future takes the pressure away for personal vengeance. Either that sin against me will be forgiven through Christ Jesus or it will still be judged. ***Either way, there’s no pressure on me.***

That’s just one practical example. We’ll look at dozens more in this series. It is so striking to me that when Peter describes the obstetrics of the new birth he links the whole process to ***hope***. He says we’ve been “***born into a “living hope.”*** And it’s of great importance that we do everything in our power to keep it blazing in our hearts until Jesus comes.