

O, THAT WE MIGHT BE A PEOPLE FILLED WITH THE DARING POWER OF BIBLICAL HOPE
 Part two - Teachings #1241 & 1243 - Sundays, January 25th & February 1st, 2009, 10:00 a.m.
 Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE SOURCES OF HOPE: The Grace of God, The Body of Christ, The Encouragement of the Scriptures

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 - “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. [14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. [16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

Hebrews 10:23-25 - “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.”

1 Peter 1:3, 22-25 - “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....22-25....Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”

Romans 15:4 - “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Last week we took some time to study the nature of hope in general, and **Biblical hope** in particular. We found that the crucial difference between the two was this: we normally use the word “**hope**” to express **desire**. Hope means we cross our fingers. Biblical hope, on the other hand, is described as a **certain, confident expectation based on the faithfulness of Father God**.

Then we closed that message looking at just how **important** hope is. We saw how hope fuels both **faith** and **holiness**. In fact, my hope is to be something outstandingly **noticeable** to those yet outside the faith: **1 Peter 3:15** - “....but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you....”

I’ve always noticed the responsibility I have as a Christian to be ready to give this verbal defence when asked about the hope I have as a believer. What I hadn’t found as shocking as I should have was the obvious fact that I should **expect** people to approach me and ask about the reason for my hope in the first place.

In other words, if people notice anything about me as a Christian, it should be my **hope**. And they should find it so amazing that they can’t keep themselves from approaching me and asking me about it. Their **curiosity** will force them to push past their natural **shyness** about approaching someone they hardly know. So strong is the appeal of the **hope** they see in my life. That’s an absolutely incredible verse of Scripture.

Obviously, hope is vitally important in the Christian walk. In fact, in future studies we're going to look in detail at the **fruit of hope** - the things that result from keeping our hope strong and bright. Things like **joy, perseverance, purity, righteousness, confidence in prayer, etc.**

Today we're going to focus, not on the **fruit** of hope, but rather, the **source** of hope. If hope is anywhere near as important as the Bible says it is, the natural question is "Where does hope come from and how can I get more of it?"

The three sources of hope are **the grace of God, the encouragement of believers in the local church, and the indwelling Word of God.** Let's look at each of them in turn:

1) HOPE FROM THE GRACE OF GOD

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 - "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. [14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. [16] **Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,** [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."

Notice those words, "**good hope through [or by] grace**"(17). That's where hope comes from. It comes from God's grace. More specifically, it comes from **noticing** and **contemplating** our experience of grace in Christ Jesus. In other words, there are **implications** to grace that I must work through in my thinking.

I must tell myself things like this: If there's no grace, there's no hope. If my salvation depends on anything other than grace, there's no hope. There are many systems and religions designed to somehow reach God in this world. All of them have good teachings in them. All have high moral aspirations and codes of moral conduct.

Hear me. Religions can all give **instruction**. That's fine as it goes. But **hope** doesn't come from **instruction**. Hope comes from **grace through Christ Jesus**. Only Jesus Christ can give hope. That's because Jesus is God's only offer of **gracious redemption for people who are still sinners**. Jesus **pardons** sinners. He came and He died for the **ungodly**.

This is not complicated. It only requires **humility** to receive it and **thoughtfulness** to appreciate it. If I get what I **deserve**, there's no hope. If I get what Jesus has won on His cross, if Jesus really died for the **ungodly**, if grace is really free and amazing, then Paul is right when he says Jesus gives us "**good hope through grace.**"

That's why the symbol of **justice** is a **balance** - a **set of scales**. And that's why the symbol of **Christianity** is a **cross**. It's the greatest symbol of hope for sinful people. Paul says there is this "**grace in which we stand**"(Romans 5:2). I take that to mean that I **live in God's grace every day. It's grace that enables me to stand**. Or, to look at it through the other end of the telescope, the moment anything takes the place of **grace** in my experience with God, I **fall**. I can't stand anywhere else.

Now grace should do many things in my life. It should make me **thankful**. It should make me **holy**. I would never want to do anything to make light of the precious blood of my Redeemer. Grace should make me **forgiving** of others. I don't just **receive** grace. I **extend** grace.

But as much as any of those things, **grace makes me hopeful**. Hopeful because, not only did my salvation not **originate** with my good deeds and merit, it is not **sustained** by my good deeds and self worth. We stand because of God's grace. Our future is secure because of God's grace. Heaven is certain because of God's grace. My own efforts are a shaky foundation, but God's

grace is unending in its scope and victory and power to those who trust in Jesus Christ.

If you don't know Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, you are eternally without hope. And you need to know that. The Bible says so - **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.**"

Paul writes to this church - the redeemed. And it's not just that we're told we **were** without hope. That's not all there is in that text. The point is we're told, now that we **have** hope in Christ, that we are to **remember** that when we were **without** Christ we were without **hope**. It's simply too easy to forget this. And we're to remember it because we are to **force ourselves** in this study of two contrasting states - hopeless and hopeful. We have all freely been given hope. And the hope comes only from the fact that we didn't **earn** God's grace. Hope comes first of all from **experiencing** and then **remembering** the mighty flow of divine grace in Christ Jesus.

2) **HOPE COMES FROM THE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM BELIEVERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST ON EARTH**

Hebrews 10:23-25 - "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."

I hope I can make you see how tightly this is linked to the previous point about hope coming from remembering the **freeness of grace in Christ Jesus**. We're not moving from grace to legalism when we talk about gathering together in the local church, the body of Christ. It's not as though we're moving away from **grace** to **religious rules**. And the reason I have to **say** this is there's a whole movement afoot telling Christians Jesus came to save them **from** religion and just make them **wild at heart**. And there's a **sense** in which that is true and a sense in which it is **dishonest and spiritually destructive**.

It is **true** in the sense that religion can't save anyone. It is true in the sense that religion can be a deadly enemy to spiritual life, as it was in the case of the Pharisees and Sadducees with whom Jesus almost never saw eye to eye.

Religion, practised apart from the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit can only do one of two things. If you practice it **well** it leads to human pride and loveless condemnation to others who **don't** do as well. And if you practice it **poorly** it can only lead to despair and hopelessness. Religion itself has little hope to give to bad people.

So certainly Jesus came to deliver us from the power of human religious systems. That much is an important truth to remember. But there's another sense in which that tired, old line - "**Jesus never came to start a religion. And you don't have to be religious to go to heaven**" - there's a sense in which it is about the most naive thing Christians still latch on to. Undisciplined Christians frequently use that old line - "Jesus came to save me from religion" - as a cloak of spirituality to mask their spiritual laziness.

Let me explain. The first point of this teaching was hope is the product of grace received through Christ Jesus. Then I labored to show the importance, not only of **receiving** grace, but **remembering** that we have received grace - **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.**" Remember the difference grace makes. Remember your lives, no matter how dark and desperate things get, have been eternally **graced**, and that changes everything.

But life is so dished out in this fallen world that we **don't** always remember we have hope through grace. Life covers up hope as surely as winter brings snow. Life sometimes **buries** hope.

Well, what will we do? How will hope be sustained? I can **pray**. I can **read my Bible**. But there's a problem. When my faith is tired and my hope is weak, I bring a very dull mind to the Word and a

very cold heart to my times of private prayer. That's the whole point. I don't **want** to study and I don't **want** to pray. Self-motivation gets sluggish, even for the very strongest of us.

But God has a plan. He wants to link us up with those who aren't going through the dark time we're facing - who are not sluggish right at this moment. But they **have** been there before, perhaps when we ourselves were flying higher spiritually. And God wants to **infuse** confidence and hope into my heart through their faith and their hope and their testimony. He wants to pump His Word into my heart from someone else - someone who may feel more passionate about it at this moment than I do. And this is **exactly** the thinking behind the instruction of the Holy Spirit in our Hebrews text:

Hebrews 10:23-25 - "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."

First, hope must be held on to. "Hold Fast the confession of our hope...."(23). It is not automatically **self-sustaining**. Don't let it slip out of your grasp. This we've already considered in this teaching.

Second, sustaining hope is a corporate rather than an individual pursuit. "And let us consider how to **stir up one another** to love and good works, **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"(24-25). Note well the repetition of "one another" and "together." One of the classic ways of "**thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought**" is simply ignoring our need for mutual encouragement.

And **third, the need for the local church will increase with the passing of time, not decrease.** "...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**"(10:25). People will get increasingly busy. We will find the number of family commitments expanding. Increasing financial pressures will require more incomes and more late evenings. The schools and the hockey leagues and the music lessons will demand more and more parental supervision.

So what are we to do to keep spiritual hope alive? How do we **not** crowd out eternal hope with a million competing momentary concerns? The Bible answer isn't well loved anymore. You do it with increased, deep involvement in the church. You fight the tendency to "**neglect**" meeting together. And you do it, quite simply, by "**not neglecting meeting together**"(25).

And then Paul adds, "**...as is the habit of some**"(25). He doesn't say **who** this "some" is, but we know they are people - **church** people - who **used** to gather more often than they do now. That's why he says they're "**neglecting**" their older, stronger life patterns. Probably because they were increasingly busy. And Paul says, if I'm to keep hope alive in my heart, I must **resist** the influence and pull of Christians who don't make church the priority they **used** to make it. In other words, these people are making a bigger blunder than they know. Don't follow their pattern.

3) **HOPE COMES FROM THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SCRIPTURES**

This link between hope and the Scriptures is made so clear that it's unavoidable in the Spirit's mind for today's church: **1 Peter 1:3, 22-25** - "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....22-25....Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since **you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;** [24] for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

Also, **Romans 15:4** - "For whatever was written in former days was written for our

instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

At least two thoughts are flagged in these verses:

a) **First, unlike any other book, the Bible possesses its own latent power to do something dynamic inside your own mind.** We should describe this a bit so we don't take it for granted. **Any** book - good or bad - can affect change in our life as you study and remember it. That is simply the way **all** literature works. That is **not** what Peter means when he says "...**you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you.**"

When Peter says the Word of God is "**imperishable**" and "**living**" and "**abiding**," he means it **carries** something with it into your human understanding. Everything else, he says, will wear out and fail. Philosophies come and go. Fads change. Best sellers are soon forgotten. So the impact of all these things is a **fading** influence. But the Word of God is enlivened by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is God. And God is eternal and Almighty. **This** is what makes the Bible a book of hope. It's not just that it **tells** us about hope. It's that it **carries** hope along in it the way electrical current carries power.

O, that we might rediscover the power God has placed in His inspired Word!

b) **Second, the promise of the Scriptures is hope to the hopeless.** Listen to Paul's words again from **Romans 15:4** - "**For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**"

How exactly does this work? Let me give you just one example. Paul uses the story of his own conversion, recorded in the Scriptures, to give **hope** to those who feel they've failed God too badly to ever be fruitful and happy again:

1 Timothy 1:12-16 - "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, [13] though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, [14] and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. [15] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. [16] But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Read the Scriptures! You will find wonderful examples of the power of God's amazing grace. You will see what God has done for others - worse blasphemers than you! Hear Paul's words: "God did this for me so that you'd know, down through the ages, that if God could reach me, He can reach anybody!"

That's just one way we receive hope through what is written in the Scriptures. The Word focuses our hearts on bigger, eternal realities to keep us from getting discouraged. There are promises for all of your needs. There are examples to be inspired by. There are mistakes to avoid. There is a beautiful description of the future that awaits the child of God.

Finally, all of this raises a question. If such is the power and potential of God's Word to inspire hope, why are there so many unchanged, hopeless lives? Why do so many people - who claim to read their Bibles - **not** light up with transformation? Why do people lack hope?

I think the Bible offers explanation: **Psalm 1:1-3** - "**Blessed is the man who walks not**

in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

As improbable as it seems to some, the Psalmist's message still rings clear and true. But there are actually **two** messages here, not **one**. In other words, receiving hope from God's Word is a **two-staged** process. And it's not merely a matter of filling your mind with God's Word that brings hope and power. This may well be the most common misconception in the church today.

Here's how it works. Hope comes from **deletion** as much as from **addition**. In fact, hope comes **first** by deletion, **then** by addition. You and I can't just **add** God's Word to our lives the way we add cream to coffee. This is why the Psalm begins where it begins. Don't start applying the Psalm at **verse 2**. You have to start with **verse one** - **“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers....”**

This is a common spiritual pattern. And it's almost universally ignored by an increasingly tolerant church. Just as I will have to expend increasing effort to **not** forsake gathering with the local church, in spite of the bad example of some, so I will have to **expel** competing voices to make room for God's hope-building Word. In other words, there is a **price to be paid** - and it's going to be a **growing price** - to find encouragement in the church and to find hope in God's Word.

And this price isn't going to diminish. Parents, this is only going to get more difficult for your children. Don't give them a lazy example. **Over-do** spiritual commitments so they have a high target to aim at. Allow for the natural slackening of dedication with the passing of time. Give them a safe margin for deterioration without total apostasy.

There is hope - wonderful hope - to be had for the godly. But it won't be found by the lazy or the careless. Like wisdom, hope is for those who dig for it like it were gold.