

HOPE WINS PART 1

HOW TO HAVE ETERNAL HOPE

4/12/20

I. Introduction

Happy Easter Everybody! This is an Easter we'll never forget. Though a lot is different and changed, the most important thing hasn't changed. Jesus is alive, we're forgiven, Heaven's gates are open wide.

We're starting a new series called "*Hope Wins*". I'm convinced that God wants to pour in gallons of hope in every area of our life. A couple of things we say around here a lot are:

- "There's no hopeless situations, only people without hope."
- "If you walk with enough hope you will see things around you change."

So, we are asking God to give us some major hope injections through our study in God's Word. I don't know if you know this, but no matter how bad things may appear right now, God isn't discouraged. He is sure that He is going to win and make sure that His people win with Him.

I like the story of the little boy who was so positive and full of hope. He had some negative neighbors, who got ticked off by how positive he was. They heard he was hoping to get a pony for his birthday so they wanted to play a joke on him. In the middle of the night they had someone pour a huge mound of horse manure on the front yard and put a sign on the top, "Happy Birthday." They thought, "This will pop his bubble." The boy woke up early, before his parents, ran outside with a shovel and started to go to town digging. The neighbors were confused watching out the window at what they were seeing. The parents ran out to see as well and asked their son what he was doing. The son said, "O Dad with this much manure, there has to be a pony in here somewhere!"

How many would agree the enemy has dumped a lot of manure lately? But God wants to give us a dose of hope to dig and find the surprised pony God has for us has in all of this!

II. Today, I want to talk about hope that wins over death. As we think about Easter Sunday, we think of the greatest victory of all, the victory of the certain hope of eternal life. We can know that we are not destined to a hopeless end, but destined to *endless* hope.

What I want us to see today is that if we can truly let Jesus set us free from the fear of death, we can be sure that we can let Jesus free us from the fear of anything!

A. It is shocking to look at what has happened to our world in 6-weeks of time. Who would've imagined that we would see a time with no professional sports, even the Olympics would be cancelled? Who could've imagined that the stock market would crash, and that people would suddenly hardly care about a

presidential election? All of the passionate rumblings of Republicans and Democrats almost seem irrelevant.

The reason, of course, is that something bigger than all of these things is suddenly gripping the world, a pandemic disease that can kill us, that we don't have a cure for. When you face the thought of death other things seem to hardly matter. The truth is that none of us are ever safe from the possibility of death. It is the thief that can come in the night; truly no one knows the day or the hour. In fact, if I've got my facts right, the last time I checked the possibility that we are all going to die is like a billion to zero! I think the point is that during normal times it's easy to ignore all of that, and not have to confront our own mortality in such a stark way.

We could easily say, "This is horrible"- but maybe not completely. Coming to grips with the reality of our mortality can have very important benefits. The thought of dying doesn't have to devastate us; it can have the opposite effect. It can sharpen our focus.

Someone said, "Until we are really prepared to die, we're not completely prepared to live." This awareness can help us prioritize our lives in important ways. Moses prayed in Psalms 90:12, "*Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*" We are all, "living on the dash." The dash is the little line on the gravestone between the date we were born and the date we die. The more conscious we are of our limited time here, the better use we can make of it. We did a sermon series a few years ago called, "*One Month to Live.*" It was powerful to think what we would want to do and say if we knew we only had one month to live.

- B. Another positive that I especially want to focus on today is that this awareness could be used by God like an alarm clock to wake people up to receive the greatest gift they could ever receive. That is the absolute assurance of what John 3:16 calls eternal life, an assurance that if we really receive it gives us a "*peace that passes all understanding.*"

This was part of what those first disciples received and celebrated when they saw Jesus alive from the grave. They didn't just see and believe that Jesus was alive; they saw in living color what it would mean for them to be alive even after they faced their mortal death. Jesus had spoken to them, "*Because I live, you will live also*" (John 14:19). Part of why He rose was to give them this absolute assurance they would live. They would live not just as an ethereal spirit or floating on a cloud but with a glorious resurrected body, in which they would eat, and celebrate with friends. They would rise to begin the most incredible life imaginable.

III. What I want to emphasize today is that to know victory over death is not only to have something great in our *future*, but to have the capacity to be filled and flooded with incredible hope *now*. This reality is not just pie in the sky but power in the present.

Thesis: You don't have to wait till you die to experience victory over death. You can have it *now*. You can experience a victory over death's power to rob you of peace and joy. You can even begin to experience the joy, faith, power and perspective you are going to have in Heaven right now.

Look at this verse with me.

Hebrews 2:9, 14-15

"But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death-that is the devil-and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

A. This describes death as a chain that Satan uses to hold people, in torment and from their potential in so many ways. But Jesus by His death and resurrection broke the power of the fear of death. As I mentioned earlier when you experience the power that sets you free from this fear, you have the power to be free from any fear.

1. I like to say that this fear is the root fear behind most if not all fears. People don't fear heights because they are high, but because they might fall and die. So much of the pessimism and hopelessness comes as a byproduct of the threat that death is going to defeat us all and steal life from us.

I heard an interesting story about some people having a picnic by a rushing river, when they heard screams coming from the water. A young child was being swept downstream struggling to stay afloat. One in the group jumped in and rescued the child but they looked up and another child was floating down the same way. They were becoming exhausted rescuing these children. Finally, they noticed one of their strong men leaving the rescue to run upstream. They yelled, "Where are you going?" He said, I'm going to stop the man who is throwing children into the river.

2. This is a picture of what Jesus did for us. Seeing us tormented by fears of all kinds, he took on Satan and his weapon of death and disempowered and destroyed death's grip so that all of us downstream can live in freedom.

B. Let me mention a few examples of the victory that the hope of Heaven and the removal of the fear of death can have in our lives.

1. It can take away the anxiety about getting old. There is a lie that some believe, “Your best days are all behind you, it’s downhill from here.”

Some thoughts about aging.

To have a living hope, in you, for Heaven is to have a deep assurance that the absolutely most incredible days of your life are all still ahead of you. You are moving to your beginning. Death will be walking through a curtain and on the other side will be Jesus and all that everything in this life was just preparation for.

Imagine what it would feel like to know that all of the combined joy and fulfillment of all the things you’ve looked forward to all of your life, was waiting just ahead... Your birthdays, Wedding, Birth of first child, new home, greatest vacation, hitting the grand slam homerun, winning the lottery, whatever you can imagine, times one billion is what that moment will be like when you step across that line.

My dad is 93 and has been through a lot of hardships including the loss of my mom. He has incredible peace. We go and visit him. When we are leaving his words are always the same, “Dale, don’t forget the best is yet to come.”

2. It takes away the sting of the sorrows and suffering. Paul would say in the great hope chapter in Romans 8:18
“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

When you know where you’re going, what you’re passing through has far less impact.

Paul was in all kinds of negative situations, but he says, I can brush these things off because this isn’t my home. One missionary described his struggles in this world like that of “spending a long night in a cheap hotel.” I remember one night in the Philippines, staying at the shadiest hotel just before I was going to travel back to the U.S. There were cockroaches and all-night karaoke blared through paper thin walls. It was insane, but I kept telling myself, “this too shall pass. I’m heading home.”

3. It helps us heal from the losses, regrets, and the pain of so many sorrows and injustices we witness and experience in this life. As much as we wish it were different, there are some bodies that won’t heal, some minds that are broken and won’t work in this life. There are things in our past we wish could be resolved but it’s too late. There are

injustices, bad things that happen that we never see justice done, things just don't even up. But our hope tells us that this life is just like the time of labor pangs before a birth; these things will be rectified. Mother Teresa said, "one kiss from Jesus and all of the wrongs of this world and wounds of this life will be undone."

There are some things that you can't fix and heal, but you can give them to Jesus because He can and will. You will see. He will take the ashes and turn them to beauty. There is a beautiful phrase in the OT, where it says, He will keep all of our tears in his bottle. There were these bottles that when a husband went off to war, some wives would keep and every time they would cry, they would put the tears in their bottle. When the husband came back with the spoils of war, they would pour them out in celebration. We will see this happen if we have Jesus when He comes back to take us home.

4. It also gives us victorious hope by helping us stay focused on *purpose*. Hopeful people aren't focused on problems; they are focused on purpose. People with a Heaven conscious know that every day matters because a day of rewards is coming. Everything we do for others is a ripple that will splash in eternity. They are focused on something bigger than this crisis; they are focused on making Heaven bigger and lives better. They are focused on helping other people have the gift of eternal life. It's my hope that we will all see that our purpose in this is bigger than surviving, (helping others come to know Jesus and the hope that is in us). Crises help us see of how little value all of the things in this world are (that is except people). Material things are not worth living in worry about.

IV. **So how do we have this hope that is bigger than death?** How can we be sure we are going to Heaven if we die? If you ask the average person on the street if they are sure they are going to Heaven when they die, you won't hear too many sure answers. I love this verse in I John 5:13, "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have eternal life.*"

The victory of hope over death comes when you have an absolute assurance in your heart, that you have eternal life. How can you get that?

- A. **We have to be sure that we are hoping in the right thing.** That we have a hope that won't disappoint us. There are many things that people are hoping in that are false hopes. They are wishes. I can hope that I could fly or run a marathon in 4 hours, but that is a hope that is going to disappoint.

I remember when I was 12-years-old; it was almost Christmas and I was hoping for a BB gun or a bicycle. I was all excited when Christmas came. What I got though was a watch. Why would a 12-year-old boy, who could care less about

being on time anywhere want a watch? I forgave my parents but I had a hope that disappointed.

There are so many theories and ideas about the hereafter. There is what science says. There is reincarnation. There are mystical beliefs about becoming one with the cosmos, beliefs that we become somebody's angel. Having a false hope about a bicycle is one thing. But can you imagine how tragic, it would be to have a false hope, standing before God and hear him say, "I'm sorry, but I never knew you. You don't get to come to Heaven; you will be separated from me forever."

So how can we have a hope that won't disappoint?

1. The good news is that Jesus made it so clear and simple. He died and rose again to provide absolute proof of the way. In fact, Jesus made His claim that He was true and that He made the way so simple and clear that no one would have to question it.

When the skeptics asked him to give them a sign to prove if what He said was true, He said, in a very bottom-line kind of way, *"kill me and in 3 days I will rise from the dead."*

There is no religious or philosophical leader in history that ever made close to this kind of dare.

2. I can't make someone believe that. But I can confidently say that there is not one in history who has come close to offering the kind of evidence that Jesus did. The historical evidence is so compelling to anyone who wants to really check it out from not just religious sources but secular sources. Jesus was crucified and over 500 witnesses saw him alive. None of which recanted, many dying a martyr's death. I liked what C.S. Lewis said, "People will die for what they think is true even if it turns out to be a lie, but people won't die for what they know is a lie." (You can find out more about this in Alpha).

Here's the evidence,
"Because I live you will live also." (John 14:19)

I Peter 1:3, *In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*

- B. The Bible says, we can have this assurance by **accepting** God's **free** gift of salvation. (John 3:16) This is so important to understand that this assurance of going to Heaven is something that comes by receiving a gift.

Ephesians 2:8, *"It is by grace that we are saved through faith, not of works, so that no one can boast."*

The reason that so many people aren't sure is that they connect going to Heaven with something they do. Did I do enough? This is religion. Religion is all about doing stuff to be good enough for God; salvation is about what God did to make us good enough for Him.

I'm not talking about religion. All religions have one thing in common; they are based on the word "Do." Salvation is based on the word, "Done." Jesus took all of our sins and paid for them on the cross. In doing so He offers us all of the good that He did, His righteousness as something we can present to God. Almost like He won the race but gives us His gold medal. That is called *grace*.

Romans 4:25 points out that this was the purpose of His death and resurrection. *"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*

1. Jesus was paying for all of our sins on the cross. Can you imagine Jesus paying for every murder, adultery, molestation, bigotry, hatred; you name it, even though He was innocent? He knows every sin you and I have or ever will commit and he was paying for all of them.
2. But not only that, He was raised for our justification. This is an amazing word. It means He was doing more than giving us a second chance. The word means, "just as if we'd never sinned." He was erasing. Some people who know they are forgiven, still feel a heavy weight. Accepting God's salvation is more than forgiveness; it is having all of it erased, and given the righteousness of Jesus. That's why Romans 8:1, says there is "no condemnation."

Someone says, but what if I give up and leave God, will I lose it? God's grace means if you truly trust Him, you can be sure He's not going to give-up on you. When our children are young, we take them by the hand at the mall or on a hike. Almost inevitably they try to pull away; we don't let them run off the cliff. Even when they let go of us, we don't let go of them. If you have walked away, he's there right now. Even if you make your bed in Hell, He is there.

- C. So, what does it take? John 3:16, says, whoever *believes*. The word means to "throw our weight on, rely, put trust in", like someone might do with a lifeguard who is rescuing them.

Rom. 10:9 says, *if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord you will be saved.*

You can make that choice today.

D. It's important that you know that when you do this, you're not just receiving a pardon or a second chance; you are receiving a *relationship*. To trust and have real assurance isn't a drive-by transaction. Jesus invites us to follow Him and be with Him. It is that relationship that you build, by learning and praying and reading the Bible and being with other Christians. I've been married to my wife for 43 years. I never doubt if I'm married. I have a relationship; we talk, we do life together. That's what Jesus wants for all of us today.

Will you pray with me?

One of the huge things I want to invite you to do is tell someone. You can email or call right now. Jesus said, "*If you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father in Heaven.*"

I have something that many people have signed; it's called a *book of life*. Maybe someone would like to have us sign your name in here today. Please call.
