

Easter Brings Hope
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Hope is something that is in short supply these days. In fact, we are living in a time of great fear and hopelessness.

Our world is fighting ever-increasing battles against terrorists – and there seems to be no end in sight – which results in hopelessness.

Our nation has an ever-increasing debt load that is so large it seems insurmountable – which results in hopelessness.

Many people are hopeless about the divide in our nation over racial and political issues.

Many Americans are overwhelmingly pessimistic and hopeless about their future. That's why I'm preaching a message today entitled Easter Brings Hope! My text is 1 Peter 1:3:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In other words – when we have faith in Jesus Christ – when we believe in His death and resurrection – we have a new birth. We are forgiven and we have a clean slate. But we are also born into hope. You see, people who try to live their lives without God are without hope. Ephesians 2:12 says:

You lived in this world without God and without hope.

Yet – those people who trust in Jesus Christ receive a living hope. Not just any kind of hope. Not a hope that comes and goes. But a living hope. A lasting hope. A life-changing hope.

I talked about hopelessness on a world-wide and a national scale – but there is also much hopelessness on a personal scale.

We can get hopeless with relationships – when we can't seem to make friends or working through family issues is difficult.

We can get discouraged at school – you study yet you get a D or you fail. Hopeless about work – you can't find a job or you get laid off.

Hopeless in finances when money is tight, bill collectors are calling, and you are so broke you can't even afford to buy hamburger for your helper!

We can get hopeless because a dream never seems to come to pass. When dreams don't come true it is easy to get discouraged. Proverbs 13:12 says:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick; but when dreams come true at last, there is life and joy.

I've been around long enough to have faced many hopeless times myself. But I submit to you today that hopelessness is not a result of circumstances. It's a result of misplaced faith!

People who trust in other people to fix their problems are doomed to hopelessness.

People who put their trust in government are doomed to hopelessness.

People who put their trust in themselves are doomed to hopelessness.

Psalm 118:8-9 says:

It is better to trust the Lord than to put confidence in men. It is better to take refuge in Him than in the mightiest king!

Hope comes from having faith in something bigger than ourselves.

Today I want to look at two men in the Bible who had to overcome hopelessness. These two men were not part of the 12 disciples, but they were part of the larger group that followed Jesus.

Now - think about the disciples after the death of Jesus. Talk about disappointment, discouragement and hopelessness. It seemed as if the bottom fell out of their lives. All of their dreams seemed to vanish when Jesus died on the cross. Their hope was buried with Him in the tomb.

Jesus' band of followers were leaderless and falling apart. The very afternoon of the report of the empty tomb, two of the discouraged and hopeless believers threw in the towel and headed for home in Emmaus. From them we see that hopelessness looks like. We find this story in Luke 24:13-35. Verse 13 says:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

1- Hopelessness can cause you to give up and go back

These men were giving up on their hopes and dreams. They were devoted to Jesus and now He was dead. It was over. So they headed home - back to their old life and old friends.

When we are discouraged we tend to withdraw from difficult or painful situations. We give up. And when we give up, when tend to go back to what is familiar.

In John 21:3 we see that other disciples also went back to the familiar.

Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also."

You've got to watch out for this when you get discouraged. Hopelessness can cause you to give up and go back. By that I mean to go backwards, or backslide. To go back to old ways – old thinking – old friends – your old life.

Life doesn't always turn out the way we expected. But don't let that drive you back to your old ways. That will only make things worse. Don't let discouragement turn you away from God. He's your only hope! Don't let hopelessness cause you to give up!

My family is from West Tennessee and a few years ago Deb and I decided to spend a couple of days sightseeing in Memphis. One of the places we went was the National Civil Rights Museum which is housed in the former hotel where Martin Luther King was shot. This museum chronicles the plight of African Americans in America and their struggle for civil rights.

You wind your way through the museum until at last you come to the spot where you are overlooking the balcony where Dr. King was shot. I can't tell you the feeling that overtakes you when you stand there.

I cannot imagine the horror experienced by the men who were with Dr. King as he lay there bleeding to death. As Ralph Abernathy held Dr. King in his arms, Andrew Young checked Dr. King's pulse and said, "It's over. It's all over!" He thought their movement was dead because their leader was dead. Still holding Dr. King in his arms, Ralph Abernathy said – through his tears, "Don't say that. It's not over! It will never be over!"

And he was right. He had confidence in the word of God which says in Philippians 1:6:

Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

He had confidence that when God starts something He always finishes it! The Civil Rights Movement did not end when Dr. King died. And the Christian faith did not end when Jesus Christ died because He rose from the dead! The resurrection proves the reality of the Christian faith.

Today, I don't know what you are fighting for or fighting against. You may have been fighting so long that you've grown hopeless. Maybe your dream is dead! But take heart today – be confident in this – your leader is not dead! Jesus is alive and well and He can give you a living hope! The God who started a good work in you will complete it!

The fact that Jesus rose from the dead means that no situation is hopeless. So don't give in and don't go back.

2- Hopelessness can move you off God's Word and onto the wrong road

When we are discouraged, we tend to stray from the word of God. Think about this: Before Jesus was crucified He told His disciples in Matthew 26:32:

After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

In fact, the disciples were told three times to meet Jesus in Galilee. But where were these men headed? To Emmaus – the total wrong direction.

Hopelessness can move you off of God's Word and onto the wrong road. This is dangerous because when we're headed in the wrong direction, we end up someone we should not be!

When we move off of God's word – we move out of God's will. And when we move out of God's will, we miss out on God's blessing. Don't let hopelessness cause you to miss the blessing of God.

3- Hopelessness can hinder you from seeing God in your situation

They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him.

Think about it – these men were walking and talking with the risen Lord and did not even know it! When things are not going our way we can become hopeless – God can be right in the middle of what's happening and we can't even see it!

We can be like Jacob who said in Genesis 28:16:

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.

In theory, we know God is with us at all times. But when we get discouraged, we sometimes think things like, "God doesn't care. In fact, where is God?" He's there, but hopelessness causes us to not recognize it.

4- Hopelessness can cause you to dwell in the past and miss God in the now

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked Him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" He asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

They went on to tell of all the good things Jesus did in the past. But they ended their story with Jesus dead. They were standing the presence of the One called Resurrection and Life and they were talking like He was dead!

And many of us are so hopeless that our stories end with Jesus dead!
 We have stories of defeat, but no victory!
 Stories of sickness, but no healing!
 Stories of poverty, but not blessing!

When we give up too soon, we end up on the wrong road and we miss out on the resurrection power of Jesus Christ! God wants stop expecting the bad that happened in the past to happen again – He wants us to expect new and better things to happen. God said in Isaiah 43:18-19:

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

God can do something new and make a way even if you feel hopeless. And He is doing it right now – do you not perceive it?

God does not want us to live in hopelessness. Jesus died and rose again so we can be birthed into a living hope. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about hope.

Please understand – biblical hope is more than an “I hope so” mentality. Hope is more than “maybe” or “possibly” or “it might happen.” Too many Christians operate on “I hope so.” But God doesn’t respond to “hope so” - He responds to faith. Bible hope is confident expectation that God will fulfill His promise. That’s what hope is – faith for the future. Without hope we live in hopelessness with no faith for the future.

But the message of Easter is that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God can turn hopelessness into hope.

Let’s look at three ways that Easter Brings Hope – three ways hope is restored.

1- Hope comes from seeing God in your situation

The men on the road to Emmaus asked Jesus to eat with them.

When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him...

To have hope we must see God in our situations. Remember – without God we are without hope.

And as long as our eyes are on ourselves – we will stay hopeless.
 As long as our eyes are on our circumstances – we will stay hopeless.
 As long as our eyes are on our past – we will stay hopeless.
 To overcome hopelessness, we must get our eyes back on God.

We must see the risen Lord at work in our lives! How does that happen? Well, in the Emmaus Road story, when were their eyes opened? At the moment of thanksgiving.

2- Restoring hope begins with thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is the gateway to God's presence. Praise will open your eyes to see God in your situation.

Here's the problem – when you are discouraged you don't feel like praising. There doesn't seem to be anything to be thankful for. At times like this, we must take the advice of the Psalmist in Psalm 43:5:

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.

We must praise God when we are discouraged, disappointed or depressed. We must praise God even when we are hopeless. Giving a sacrifice of praise when you do not feel like it will turn hopelessness into hope. Why? Because God inhabits praise. Praise will bring the presence of God into the middle of your life. Hebrews 6:19 says:

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.

Praise gets us into God's presence where we find an anchor called hope.

3- Restoring hope requires returning to God

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen..."

When you are discouraged you want to run from your problems. But God wants you to run to Him with your problems. Remember – without God – you are without hope. The only way to find hope is to turn to God.

When you turn to God, you will find that His promises are true and His plans for you are good. Jeremiah 29:11 says:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

God wants to give you new hope and new vision for your future.

Winston Churchill is considered one of history's great leaders. He was the Prime Minister of the UK during the dark days of World War 2. When he died, many world leaders attended his funeral.

Sir Winston had spent much time planning his funeral, which took place in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. As a Christian, he included many of the great hymns of the church. After the benediction, a bugler, positioned high in the dome of St. Paul's, played the song "Taps." Taps is the universal signal that the day is over and is used in many military funerals to signify that life is over.

However – Sir Winston had planned a surprise. As soon as Taps was finished – another bugler on the other side of the dome played the song "Reveille" – the tune that is used to announce the new day and to wake soldiers up in the morning – "It's time to get up, it's time to get up, it's time to get up in the morning."

What Sir Winston understood was that when life ended on earth – it was just beginning in heaven. When we say our last "Good night" on earth – we say our first "Good morning" in heaven. Sir Winston wanted to leave people with hope. He wanted us to know that for the Christian – our last song is not Taps, but Reveille.

There is hope beyond the grave because Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life. On Good Friday – when Jesus was crucified – Satan played Taps. He thought it was over and he had won. Pilate played Taps – he was glad it was over. The disciples played Taps – they were sad it was over.

But they did not know Jesus had another song to play! On Easter morning heaven sounded Reveille -
"It's time to get up, it's time to get up, it's time to get up in the morning."

And Jesus did get up that morning when He rose from the dead!
And because Jesus rose from the dead – Easter brings hope!
A living hope. A lasting hope. A life-changing hope.
Because He lives – we can face tomorrow.
Because He lives – all fear is gone.

Now - we have an enemy in life who wants to keep us hopeless.
He wants to keep us beat down and broke up!
He wants to keep us over our heads and under pressure!
He wants to keep us living above our means and beneath our destiny!
He wants to keep us passed over and past due!
He wants to keep us in a hurry, in a mess, in pain and in doubt!
He wants to keep us between a rock and a hard place!
He uses all these ways to try to make us hopeless!

And some of you feel dead inside – but Easter Brings Hope of new life!
Some of you are sick - but Easter Brings Hope of healing!

Some of you feel your marriage is dead and should probably be buried - but Easter Brings Hope of restoration.

Some of you are struggling with a sin or an addition – but Easter Brings Hope of freedom!

Some of you are struggling with unforgiveness, anger, bitterness - but Easter Brings Hope of a changed life!

Some of you have believed and prayed for something for a long time and you've given up hope of ever receiving an answer - but Easter Brings Hope of an answer!

Some of you are so hopeless that you're not sure if you even believe in God anymore - but Easter Brings Hope of salvation!

The message of Easter is that through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, we can face anything in life with the assurance that God will get us through it and work it out for our good! That's how Easter brings hope!

The resurrection is true and that same power that raised Christ from the dead can give you a brand new life and living hope.

God's done His part - so what's your move? Romans 10:9-10 tells us:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.