

Forward in Hope
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Today we are beginning a new sermon series called Forward in Hope. This is very timely, because with all that is going on in our world today, many people have lost hope for their future.

Our world is fighting so many things. A worldwide pandemic and endless threats of terrorism cause hopelessness. Ever-increasing disasters: earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes – things we can do nothing about – which results in hopelessness.

Our nation has ever-increasing division and a debt load that is so large it seems insurmountable – which results in hopelessness. This will be the first generation of Americans who do not have the hope that they will do better than their parents financially. Young Americans are overwhelmingly pessimistic and hopeless about their future.

So - we face hopelessness on a world scale and a national scale – but also on a personal scale. 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 with relationships – You can't seem to make friends. 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! Hopelessness is a pandemic today!

But as believers in Jesus Christ – we should always have hope. 1 Peter 1:3 says:

In His great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

When we are born again God births us into a living hope. A hope that does not come and go. Someone once said, “There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.”

Biblical hope is faith for the future. It is not wishful thinking – it is to confidently believe something will happen in the future to the point you prepare for it. What are you preparing for?

I once heard about a quaint, well cared for New England town. One day someone came to the town to visit their relatives and noticed that the town was looking shabby and uncared for. They asked their relatives why the town looked so bad and they were told that their town was the site of a new electric power plant. A dam would be built across the river and the town would be submerged under water.

When the project was announced, the people were given many months to arrange their affairs and move away. During those months, a curious thing happened.

All improvements ceased. No painting was done. No repairs were made on the buildings, roads, or sidewalks. Day by day the whole town got shabbier and shabbier. A long time before the waters came, the town looked abandoned, even though the people had not yet moved away.

That town was cursed with hopelessness because it had no future. One citizen explained, "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."

And many people live life that way.
 Without hope for the future, they have no power in the present.
 Without hope for the future, they have no motivation or endurance.
 But we are born into a living hope, so we need to learn to live in 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 are birthed into 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'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 in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

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 in order to move forward in hope. These 2 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, grief 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.

Luke 24 records the story of 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.

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

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

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.

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 – old life.

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

Today, I don't know what you are fighting for or fighting against. You may have been fighting so long and so hard that you've grown tired or discouraged. 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! 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 wrong direction.

Hopelessness can get you headed in the wrong direction. Hopelessness can move you off of God's Word and onto the wrong road. Hopelessness can cause you to move away from the plan of God.

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 cause you to not see God in your situation

14 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.

I'm very encouraged by the fact that even though these disappointed believers were on the wrong road, Jesus came after them! But think about it – these men were walking and talking with the risen Lord and did not even know it!

Likewise, when our hopes and dreams are not coming true – when we are disappointed – God can come after us and 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.*

We are believers. We are people of faith. In theory, we know God is with us at all times. He never leaves us or forsakes us. But when we get discouraged, we sometimes think things like, "God doesn't care. In fact, where is God?" He's there, but we don't recognize it.

God can be right in the middle of our marriage, but we're so disappointed in our spouse that we don't see God.

God can be right in the middle of our finances, but we're so focused on our bank account that we don't see God.

God can be right in the middle of our lives, but we're so focused on ourselves that we don't see God.

He's right there all along, but hopelessness keeps us from seeing Him.

Hopelessness also causes you to not believe God's Word. Jesus said to the 2 men in Luke 24:25-26

How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?

When we are disappointed, we tend to not believe the word of God. And if we stop believing, we stop receiving. James 1:6-7 says:

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.

But with God's help, we can turn doubt into hope. How? Overcoming hopelessness requires seeing God in our situation. That usually happens through the Word and through worship.

That happened to the men on the Emmaus Road. Luke 24:27 says:
Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

Hope is restored through the Word of God. That's why the 2 men said in Luke 24:32

Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?

Likewise, you will never understand the Word unless Jesus opens it to you. But when He does – you move forward in hope. Romans 15:4 says:

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

To move forward in hope we must renew our minds with God's Word.

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

17-19 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk and are sad?" 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... "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."

They went on to tell of all the good things Jesus did in the past. But they ended their story with Jesus dead because they lost hope. 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! God wants to get us out of expecting what's happened in the past to happen again and begin to expect new and better things to happen. Isaiah 43:18-19 says:

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.

Please understand - hope is more than an "I hope so" mentality. Hope is more than "maybe" or "possibly" or "it might happen."

Many people think of hope along the lines of “I hope I inherit a million dollars, or I hope I get that job that I applied for, or I hope it doesn’t rain.” Too many Christians operate on “I hope so.” They say things like, “I sure hope God heard my prayer.” You hope God hears you? That is not true Bible hope; it shows no confidence in God or His Word. God doesn’t respond to “hope so” - He responds to faith.

Bible hope is confident expectation that God will fulfill His promise. Without hope we live in hopelessness with no faith for the future. But the truth is that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God can turn hopelessness into hope. Let’s look at three things that restore hope.

1- Hope comes from seeing God in our situation

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

30-31 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. How does that happen? Well, in the Emmaus Road story, when were their eyes opened?

At the moment of thanksgiving.

2- Restoring Hope starts 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.
 And hope is the opposite of disappointment.
 When you're disappointed you want to run, but hope will anchor you.
 When you're disappointed you tend to get on the wrong road, but hope will anchor you.
 When you're disappointed you feel like giving up and going back, but hope will anchor you.
 When you're disappointed you're easily blown off course, but hope will anchor you.
 I encourage you today, overcome your disappointment by praising God until you get into His presence and your soul gets anchored in hope!

3- Restoring hope requires returning to God and His people

33-34 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 and His people with your problems. Remember – without God – you are without hope. The only way to move forward in hope is to turn to God. And many times that hope is found when you return to church.

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. Because Jesus rose from the dead – we have a living hope. A lasting hope. A life-changing hope.

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 at a loss at any cost!
 He wants to keep us passed over and past due!
 He wants to keep us off track and off balance!
 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!

But through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, we can face anything in life with the assurance that Jesus will get us through.
 That gives us a living hope!
 That keeps us always moving forward in hope!