

Christ Community Covenant Church
Finding Hope Sermon Series ‘Real Hope’
Pastor Scott Parr – September 7, 2014

(Reference to movie clip in the beginning of UP, where Carl & Ellie experience some of life’s joys and hardships. They keep a jar labeled “Paradise Falls,” which is a long-term hope of a place to visit.

That clip speaks powerfully of 2 things we’re going to talk about today – life is hard, but hope is powerful.

We, as humans, are radically hope-based creatures. We need hope to keep going.

The other pastors and I want to speak to very practical issues of life in these next 4 weeks. What do we do when life hurts? What is the deal with that anyway - doesn’t God love us? Then why is life so hard? Why have these terrible things happened in our lives? How do we find hope when life is so hard?

Some of us have experienced enormous suffering. Terrible conflict. Great loss. Heavy grief. Chaotic uncertainty.

What are some circumstances where people really need hope? (Congregation, please answer)

In the last few years, Becki and I have experienced and witnessed the painful stuff of life in our own lives and the lives of friends. We’ve had a miscarriage. Isaac had a terrible health scare in his first week alive. We’ve walked with dear friends who have experienced things like the pain of longing to be married, cancer, addictions, divorce, rejection from friends, unemployment, financial crises, abuse, and even rape. Life can be so tragic.

And so for the next 4 weeks, we are going to focus on hope – What is hope? How do we have hope in times of conflict? In tragedy? What does hope look like in our times of loss – losing a friend, our health, a relationship, or a loved one? What is our hope when our future is very uncertain?

We’re not talking about Dumb Luck Hope – a wish. “I hope I get an A on this test! Didn’t study, didn’t go to class.”

We’re not talking about Goals and Long-Term Effort Hope – like when I grow up, I hope to be a _____, or I hope to get married and have a family. I hope I’ll retire at 65. These can be really good life goals – but they are not totally up to us, and they won’t fully satisfy our lives.

These kinds of hopes are feelings. But when we talk about the hope God offers, we aren’t talking about just a feeling. We are talking about a fact.

We don’t say “I have this hopeful feeling that God won’t die.” We say, “I know for a fact that God lives forever, and so I have HOPE that God’s going to work this out for good.”

Today, I want to help us understand – what is real hope? What is a hope that we can count on that’s more than just ‘I’m feeling lucky?’ And where do we find real hope? All over the Bible we can find messages of hope, and today we’ll be looking at Romans 8:15-28.

The reality of our broken situation

- V. 17-18 we will suffer
 - o Paul’s sufferings
 - o Christians’ hard times in those days
 - ♣ Oppressed by a pagan government – powerless and overtaxed
 - ♣ Hated by their culture
 - ♣ Persecuted even unto torture and death
- V. 19 the creation is broken
 - o From the curse in Genesis 3...
 - ♣ You will surely die...
 - ♣ “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
 - ♣ “Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
 - ♣ ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;

for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

- **Creation itself groans**
- In John 16:33 Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
- Don’t be surprised when we face hardships and tragedy –
 - ♣ God in his wisdom, set up a world where real freedom and real love are possible
 - ♣ Humans, in our real freedom to choose good and evil, have chosen evil, selfishness, and all of creation is broken – and the world is a mess because of it.

So this is a grave situation. Where do we find real hope?

- Faithfulness of God in the Past
 - God has proven he is capable of coming through, even in the hardest times.
 - God keeps his promises – Abraham, all the way to Jesus...
 - The Exodus was perhaps the biggest reminder of what God is capable of doing. The Jews would say, “The Lord God – the one who rescued us out of slavery in Egypt!” Even God, when addressing his people would often remind them, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt.”
 - And so much more – over and over again, in real accounts, we see God’s proven character –
 - ♣ God redeems
 - ♣ God restores people to himself
 - ♣ God reconciles
 - ♣ God forgives
 - ♣ God overcomes evil
 - ♣ God provides for his people
- Presence of God’s Spirit in the Present
 - God is with us – Romans 8:26ff God’s spirit even prays for us when all we have is groans. If all you can do is utter a “UNNNNG” then at least let that be a “UNNNNGG” to God, you have hope. You’re on the right track.
 - God’s spirit is called the comforter, the paraclete, the one who walks beside.
 - “I will never leave you, nor forsake you” he says.
 - God knows suffering – he understands – and he is with you.
- The triumph of Christ in the Future
 - Vs. 18 the future glory that will be revealed to us...
 - ♣ We’ll experience **full life with God**, with all the love, beauty, power, and joy that comes with being **adopted** into God’s family
 - ♣ **Jesus rose from the dead** and he has proven that he will conquer death once and for all. We who trust in him will rise again with him!
 - ♣ Satan – the embodiment of evil – will be thrown into the lake of fire. Isis will be crushed like a spider. Cancer will be obliterated.
 - ♣ Romans 5 talks about how Jesus Christ broke the curse – Romans 5:17: For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.
 - ♣ Revelation 22:3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.
 - ♣ Revelation 7:16-17. They will hunger no more, neither shall they thirst anymore, for the Lamb – Jesus – at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

And so I want us to take a moment to ask God to meet us in the places we need hope. Close your eyes, and tell God the hopeless situation you are experiencing.

God, what have you proven about yourself in the past that can give me hope?

God, how can I know that you’re with me right now?

God, how can I make it through this dark tunnel by looking toward the bright future we have in Christ’s victory over sin, evil, and death?

And so when you are in the middle of a hard time, hear this – Romans 8:28 God works all things together for good... Don't just say that to anyone right in the middle of a crisis. It's one of the worst things to say to someone "God is giving you this to make you better..."

But here's the truth: all of creation is marred by sin, and sometimes life is just hard, because all of creation is broken.

But look to the past and know this: God is a proven expert at taking what is broken and fixing it. Sometimes God redeems things over a process that takes years and years - but take heart, because God is faithful.

Look to the present and know this: God's spirit is with you, even in your darkest times – and will even pray for you when all you can do is groan.

And look to the future and know that God will come through – we can have confident expectation that because the Lord Jesus Christ has overcome sin, evil, and even death – that God WILL work all things together for good for those who love him.

Put your hope in God.

Hope in the Communion Table

We're going to transition now to a time of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Jesus invites us to Holy Communion, saying "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Participating in this experience is for all who confess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Maybe today he is calling someone in here to do that for the first time.

At Jesus' last supper with his disciples, he shared with them a new and REAL hope. Just before Jesus was about to experience human suffering in so many ways, he shared a meal of hope that we continue to share in today. Jesus was about to be betrayed, disowned by his closest friends, feel abandoned by God, be physically tortured, and hung naked on a cross, exposed, alone, and in terrible pain until his death. The next day, Jesus himself would say something that maybe you've said before – "My God, my God – why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knew suffering. God in human flesh experienced in his own body, and in his own relationships, the fullness of the brokenness of the world. But before doing all that, he gave us something that gives us hope every time we experience it together – communion...

Questions for use in small group:

1. How have you experienced hope in God in your life?
2. What is a situation right now where you could use some hope?
3. What aspect of "REAL hope" (past, present, future) seems most helpful to you right now?