

Christ Community Covenant Church
Finding Hope: In Tragic Loss
Pastor Dave Scherrer - September 28, 2014

Today we will be wrapping up our series on hope. Not that we have come any more near than just touching on the subject. This is of course one of the great words of words in Scripture and one of the great themes of Scripture. I urge you to consider a word study on Hope. I think you would be encouraged by that study.

It has been important to confront because the experience of 'hope' as the world translates it fails us. Hope identified as cultural hope is merely an optimistic desire that something good might happen by accident. This hope is not a guaranteed hope because it is subject to changeable people and circumstances.

When we use the word "**hope**" in casual conversation, it has a wavering, uncertain sound. Most people live in **hope** that things will improve for them and that they will finally be satisfied in whatever their specific want may be. One of the frightening observations of our day is that there are so many, particularly the young, who have no hope. Hope does not seem to be on their side. In a culture of death and confusion, suicides are on the increase annually, and a recent poll said the majority of teens in our day have no hope for the future. For the first time in the history of our country, sociologists and economists are saying that our children will have it worse economically than our generation. Kids in the urban core see their friend dead or in jail by age 20 and so they live lives of hopelessness. And so we see so many of our young living recklessly hoping to find satisfaction in the present moment. Our society is characterized by a pervading sense of hopelessness. Unfortunately the Church is not immune to this hopeless feeling. Many who claim to be born again believers in Jesus Christ are searching for fulfillment in life. The truth of Scripture is that we were not made for the present, and the present was never intended to satisfy us.

In contrast the **Hope** we have been talking about these past several weeks here at 4Cs is the confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what God will do in the future. That is why our messages from the past weeks have been filled with references to hope satisfied in the past, hope realized in the present and hope expected in the future. This contrasts to the world's definition of hope as wishful thinking feeling that whatever I want will happen – just 'cuz. Understood in this way, hope can denote either a baseless optimism or a vague yearning after an unattainable good. If hope is to be genuine hope, however, it must be founded on something (or someone) which affords reasonable grounds for confidence in its fulfillment. The Bible bases its hope in God and His saving acts. Romans 8:24-25 tells us:

"For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

Spiritual blessings come under the category of what we cannot see. Things not seen that are eternal (remember our verse?). We may see some of the results, but it still requires faith and hope. For example, we do not see the justifying work of God that clears our debt of sin or the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our lives. We can't see that stuff, it's eternal. Nor do we see the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we are saved or our co-union with Christ where we are hidden with Him in heaven. But we feel and know of his presence. We **know** this to be a reality, but this is a matter of our **hope** in the promises of God.

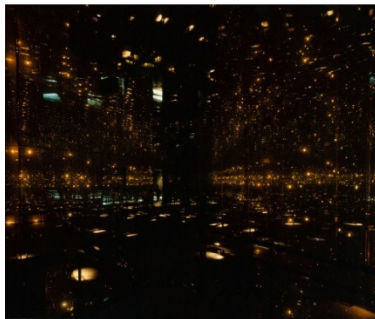
What stands in the way for so many of us is the circumstance of terrible human loss and its corresponding grief. And loss and grief and pain and tragedy are a major stumbling block for those who are considering following Christ.

Loss and Grief – the stumbling block of Christianity

Discussion: Life is relentless and often tragic from our perspective. Let's talk about loss: What are some of the things that we lose that can cause despairing grief and hopelessness?

Sometimes the nature of the loss and grief is too staggering to imagine. I will try not to say this too much but "When we were in Israel" we went to ***Yad Vashem World Center for Holocaust Research*** founded in 1955 in Jerusalem in tribute to the 6 million Jews who died in the years surrounding WWII.

The name "Yad Vashem" is taken from a verse in the Book of Isaiah: Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls ***a place and a name*** (yad vashem) . . . I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 56:5). Naming the Holocaust memorial "yad vashem" conveys the idea of establishing a national depository for the names of Jewish victims who have no one to carry their name after death. Of those 6 million Jews killed one and a half millions were children and infants. There is a memorial to the children and it is a sobering experience.



In Nobel peace prize author Elie Wiesel's classic work ***Night***, he describes an autobiographical but fictionalized account of his and his father's incarceration at Auschwitz through the descriptions of 16 year old Eliezer;

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.
Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.
Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.

(Night, Section 3, Elie Wiesel)

This quote occurs just after Eliezer and his father realize they have survived the first selection at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is perhaps ***Night's*** most famous passage, notable because it is one of the few moments in the memoir where Eliezer breaks out of the continuous narrative stream with which he tells his tale. As he reflects upon his horrendous first night in the concentration camp and its lasting effect on his life, Wiesel introduces the theme of Eliezer's spiritual crisis and his loss of faith in God.

Without looking down on our own circumstances that cause our own lives to be hopeless, this account leaves us speechless. This kind of loss and grief is beyond thought. We cannot wrap our minds around it. We can only hope that none of us will ever experience such despairing circumstances. And tragedy like this seems to burn up hope in its searing heat. Still as we noted earlier, in our lives loss is real and we only have a universe of one to work with. And the loss of a loved one, the terrible ravages of cancer and Alzheimer's, the grief over a failed relationship or the death of a dream for college placement or a prom date that never happened, all place us at risk of losing hope. Especially if that hope is falsely placed.

False Hope: Placing hope in things that go away

Life gives us no guarantees, although it seems like it in our country. The American dream tells us that if we work hard and have perseverance we can have it all. But Jesus only promised us two things – “In the world you will have tribulation” but He also said “I have overcome the world and its trials.” Then there is the problem of just flat out missing the main point altogether.

Missing the Point: It is not about my comfort or my “momentary, light afflictions” but about God and His purposes

It is easy to forget in this self-centered world, that we are created for His purposes, not God for ours. You remember the story of Job and his pain. That story exists as proof text that God is willing to allow very difficult things to come into our lives, tragic and horrific things, so that his purposes and his glory is perfected. It is not and never has been just about us.

1 Peter 1:3-7

³ 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 (not a dead idea)*** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you (***unseen***), ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice (***you have real lasting joy***) though now for a little while, if necessary, ***you have been grieved by various trials***, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—***may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (these trials are about Christ and His receiving glory)***.

And that brings us back to our second point – it is not and never has been about us, all of life is about the praise and glory and honor of Jesus Christ. From this side of eternity, this perhaps seems a difficult reality. But the reality is that there is only one true hope for the human condition – Jesus Christ the Risen Lord.

There is only one Hope for the human condition - Jesus Christ the Risen Lord

The cross is vital to our faith, but that grim execution is pointless without the validation and authority that has been bestowed at the resurrection. Paul knows that our hope lies in the reality of a risen Christ:

1 Corinthians 15:17-20, 25-26

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Hope – confident assurance - is yours for the asking - “Father save me from this hopeless condition!”

Gospel prayer

This is where our hope is, in the resurrected Lord Jesus. But this hope is not for us to keep inside ourselves. It is to share with others. Hope is meant to be a corporate phenomenon.

Hope is meant to be a corporate phenomenon

Later in the same account by Elie Wiesel he writes this:

“Our obligation is to give meaning to life and in doing so to overcome the passive, indifferent life. There's a long road of suffering ahead of you. But don't lose courage. You've already escaped the gravest danger: selection. So now, muster your strength, and don't lose heart. We shall all see the day of liberation. Have faith in life. Above all else, have faith. Drive out despair, and you will keep death away from yourselves. And now, a prayer - or rather, a piece of advice: let there be comradeship among you. We are all brothers, and we are all suffering the same fate. The same smoke floats over all our heads. Help one another. It is the only way to survive.” *Night, Section 3, Elie Wiesel*

This is admirable hope, rallying others to perseverance but remember - hope based on wishful thinking isn't hope at all. Our hope, as Curt put it last week, is that even when it is not alright, in Christ it is ultimately alright. Someday those of us hidden with Christ in heaven will be changed and we will be with Christ forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

When I was in Israel we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher believed by some to be the location of Calvary and the tomb in which Christ was buried. We also visited the Garden Tomb, a location identified by 19th century archeologists as what they thought was a more compelling argument for his death and resurrection.



John 20:1-9

20 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the

other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."³ So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb.⁴ Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there,⁷ and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

You know what they saw when they looked in? They saw the same thing I saw.



Nothing. They saw nothing. Christ was not where they expected him to be. They were without hope, but then the tomb was empty! "Encourage each other with these words!" He is risen . . . He is risen indeed. "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:19).

So we have a hope grounded in the past remembering everything that God has done and his faithfulness to his promises. There is the current hope in the resurrection and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Finally there is the hope, the assurance we have that Christ is returning to make all things new and bring His Kingdom to Earth.

Benediction: Romans 15:13

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.