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No - Know Hope
December 1st, 2013, Jeff Germo

Well, it's hard to believe, but we are in the Advent season again. I don't know about you, but it always comes a little too fast for me. When I was a kid I was always so excited about Christmas. In my childlike way it filled me with a sense of hope as I waited to find out what kinds of gifts I would get. I have memories of our extended family on my mother's side all gathering together at the farm in Saskatchewan. My mother's family had nine kids and most of them had their own families and so we would all be packed into a small house for about week over Christmas and all the Christmas gifts would be stacked around the tree and piled as high as the ceiling against the wall. It was an awesome sight for my little eyes. I couldn't wait to open my gifts on Christmas Eve.

So, the days before Christmas Eve my eyes would be on those gifts wondering what I would sort of hidden treasure I would find when I unwrapped them. And I hated waiting. I hated waiting back then, and I'm still not a very good waiter. Then Christmas Eve would finally come and my Grandpa Joe would read the Christmas story from Luke 2 and the whole time I would be squirming like I had ants in my pants. And then he would pray a blessing on each of the families naming everyone by name. Back then there were only about forty of us. Now there are over one hundred and fifty. Well, after blessing each one by name we would begin opening our gifts — one by one — person by person — from the youngest to the oldest. And I was one of the oldest grandkids. It was excruciatingly painful for me. I was placing my hope in hauling in some good loot.

This is the first Sunday of Advent and for the next four Sundays we are going to unwrap some gifts that God has given us as His children because of Jesus coming to earth 2000 years ago. Today we are going to talk about what true hope is. The following Sundays will be Peace, Joy, and then we will wrap it up with Love.

I often get emails from people offering to give me an extraordinary amount of money. This is really true. I sometimes receive several emails a day. The other day I got emails from three different people with some pretty incredible stories about how they had chosen me out of seven billion people on earth to be the recipient of a whole lot of money. What an amazing coincidence! God must be saying something to me. I'm so excited. And they all seem to genuinely want me to become rich beyond my wildest imagination. And I don't even know these people. One was from Sierra Leone, and the other two from Burkina Faso. And by some strange coincidence each of them has come into some very large quantities of money in the most unbelievable ways. It's almost too good to be true. And all I have to do is give them all my banking information. It's so easy, so simple. I can hardly wait. No more financial worries. Vacations in the sun, new cars, big house. I am going to live the good life. I sure hope it works. Now, what is going to happen if I place my hope in a scam like this? My hopes will be dashed, and am going to be hurt.

The word 'hope' has lost its original meaning in contemporary times. Now, if I said to you, "I hope it doesn't rain too much in the Campbell River this winter", what would you think? You would think I was a dreamer. My hope is not based on reality. The chances of it not raining is on the North Island in the winter is slim to none. So, that kind of hope is really a wish that is based on fantasy. It's not going to happen.

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Now, I'm going to say a couple of other statements and you tell me what the difference is between them. And I really "hope" I don't offend anyone here this morning.

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1. I hope the Saskatchewan Roughriders win the Grey Cup this year.

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2. I hope the BC Lions win the Grey Cup this year.

What's the difference between these two statements? The one is a sure thing because it has already happened. The other is sheer lunacy because the Grey Cup is finished and the Lions weren't even in the game. You can hope all you want, but at this point it is not going to do you any good.

The word 'hope' has lost its meaning today. Here are some dictionary definitions of the word.

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"Something good that you want to happen in the future." (Cambridge Dictionary) That's a pretty accurate description of how we use the word today. **"To cherish a desire with anticipation."** **<hopes for a promotion>** (Websters)

The word 'hope' has become synonymous with 'wish.'

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Cross my fingers – throw a coin in the wishing well and make a wish, or make a wish before you blow out the candles on your birthday cake. The word, 'hope' has softened over years and has been reduced to something that you wish would happen, whether or not it is based on anything concrete. But, that's not the Bible's definition of the word.

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The biblical definition of 'hope' is **To look forward with confidence to that which God has promised.** Biblical hope is looking forward to a sure thing. Hope is so important to the Christian life that it is seen as one of the three defining traits of Christian character – faith, hope, and love. Hope is essential to life. Hope keeps us living. Without it we would give up.

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The biblical sense of the word has nothing to do with our circumstances and everything to do with knowing that you can trust God with your future. It has to do with something that is. Biblical hope has to do with the promises of God.

Abraham believed God, or had a solid hope in God's promise that He would become the father of many nations even though his circumstances gave no indication that this promise could become a reality.

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Romans 4:18-21 (NLT) says about Abraham,

¹⁸ Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, "That's how many descendants you will have!"^{*} ¹⁹ And Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb.

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²⁰ Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.

That's true hope. Had Abraham looked at his circumstances he would have given up. Nothing about his current situation gave him any indication that what God had promised him would become a reality. He was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90 and God promised them that He was going to make their descendants number greater than the sands on the shore and the stars in the sky, and yet they had no children. Humanly speaking it was impossible.

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For the Christian, our hope is based on something that has already been guaranteed. It's not based on what our situation is right now. Your circumstances at present might look rather bleak. Maybe your life hasn't turned out the way you expected it.

Maybe your health is not what it should be. Maybe you are not as financially secure as you would like to be. Maybe your relationships aren't what they should be. Or maybe your situation is the opposite. Maybe your health is great, financially you are sitting pretty. You don't have a lot of worries. Things are going along just tickety boo. Whatever your situation is right now, whether it's good or bad, the Bible says that we are not to look at our circumstances, but to the God who always fulfills His promises.

When we have a belief in the living God who has intervened in human life throughout history, and continues to do so, and who can be trusted 100% of the time to fulfill His promises, true hope becomes possible.

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Biblical hope is inseparable from faith in God. The two are inextricably linked.

We look at what God has done in the past, and particularly that He prepared for the coming of Christ 2000 years ago, for which we are celebrating this Advent. And then because of what He has done in the past, and what He is doing even now in the present continuous tense, we can dare to look expectantly forward to the future, knowing that God is big enough to make do on all His promises. We have a future that has been secured by the living God who always fulfills His promises.

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2 Corinthians 1:3-11 (NLT)

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵ For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.

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⁶ Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷ We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

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⁸ We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it.

⁹ In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.

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¹⁰ And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. ¹¹ And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.

So, we can see here that Paul and his colleagues had been experiencing some pretty dismal things.

Some of the words he uses express a situation that is, humanly speaking, not very hopeful: **"trouble"** (4 times); **"sufferings"** (3 times); **"weighed down"**; **"patiently endure"**; **"crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure"**; **"we expected to die"**; **"mortal danger"**.

Paul is describing a situation that is very bleak indeed. Can anyone relate to this right now? Maybe you are experiencing difficulty right now and you are feeling some of these same things. But, in the middle of all that he also uses some incredibly hopeful language:

"God is our merciful Father"; **"the source of all comfort"**. He uses the word "comfort" 10 times in 5 verses; **"We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us"**. In your Bible you might have the word "hope" instead of confidence. That is some pretty hopeful language isn't it?

Why is Paul so hopeful? It's obviously not because their circumstances were good. It must be something deeper. His hope is not shaken because he knows that God is still sovereign. He is still God. And Paul says in verse 9 that God allows all of this to happen for a reason.

Why?... – So that they would not rely on themselves, **but on God who raises the dead.**

I don't know about you, but I like to be in control of my own life. And when things are going well with me I have a tendency to think that it's because of my own acumen. And when things are not going so well... that's another story. That's when I call out to God and recognize that I need Him.

Whatever is happening in your life right now, God wants to use it to show you that He is trustworthy. In verse 10 Paul says that God did deliver them, and because He was good for His word in the past he says he can trust Him in the future.

"We have placed our confidence in him, and he will rescue us." Above all, God is a rescuer, or a deliverer. That is the message of the Bible in a nutshell. Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to set their hope, not on their circumstances, or even that God would rescue them from their current situation, but on God's 100% track record of faithfulness.

He is always faithful. Even when we are in the middle of a storm, we can know that, for some reason, God has allowed it, and He will carry us through it. You know, the majority of the letters that were written in the New Testament were penned in the middle of very trying circumstances. Paul, Peter, and James, or any of the other writers didn't usually write to just say, "Hi, how are you. I am fine."

There were problems that needed to be addressed. The Christians were sometimes feeling very hopeless and like giving up. And the letters of the New Testament were usually written to help them to understand how to love each other in the middle of their difficult circumstances or to remind them of the hope that they have in Christ.

Usually if I am feeling like my situation is hopeless and wallowing in the muck and mire of self-pity, I don't see the needs of others around me. My focus is on poor me. But, Paul always turns the focus outward.

How many of you have an easy time being civil in the middle of a crisis? It's hard, and maybe even impossible to love others when our focus is turned inward. Here's how Paul says to handle ourselves in situations like this.

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Romans 12:9-13

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.* ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Do you want to know what the best remedy for self-pity is? It's a two part remedy.

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- 1. Turn your focus away from yourself, and towards the cross of Christ.**
- 2. And the onto the needs of others.**

Our temptation is to say to God, "Fix me up first and then I'll be able to be of use to you. Make everything all better and then I'll serve you, or help others. When I win the lottery, then I'll be able to contribute more." And we put conditions on our service to God. But, God says, "No, my child. I want to use you right now, in your brokenness. As a matter of fact, I only use broken vessels."

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The question is **how are we responding to God in the situation that we are in?** When people see us responding with grace, love and hope in the middle of difficulty it points them to Jesus.

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The Christian hope is not that our situation will get all better here on earth. The Christian hope is not that God will fix all our problems. The Christian hope is much deeper than that. It is one that can overcome any and all obstacles.

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The hope is two-fold. **We have a hope that our place with Him in heaven is secured.** That means that our life on earth is temporary. It is a very short dot in the line of eternity. The whole New Testament is replete with a future oriented outlook so that we will take our eyes off of our lives down here, and on to what God has promised for us in eternity.

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And, secondly, we have the hope that right now, in **whatever circumstances we find ourselves, He will use it for our good and for His glory.**

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Our hope is in a God who is able to fulfill all of His promises. And He has promised that every single thing that happens to us will be used for good **if** we love Him and are living according to His purposes. No matter what your situation is right now, the Bible says that nothing can separate you from God's love. That is a fact, and that is our hope as Christ-followers.



No - KNOW Hope
Week of December 1st, 2013

Objective: To allow the Spirit of Jesus to change our hearts so that our eyes are open to what he is doing outside the church walls and join him in that.

Worship (5-10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. Have someone read Psalm 33 meditatively to the group.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5-10 minutes)

Icebreaker: What are you looking forward to in 2014?

Word (30 - 40 minutes)

1. What stood out for you from the sermon?
2. What is the difference between hope and optimism?

The Scripture passages used in the sermon, which we are going to consider in this study, are all written by the Apostle Paul, in situations of suffering. Yet they all talk about profound reasons for solid hope. Keep that in mind while discussing the following:

3. **Romans 4:18-21.** Why did Abraham's hope and faith not waver in spite of the fact that he and Sarah were both as good as dead, reproductively speaking?
4. **Romans 5:1-5.** What reasons are given here for hope?
5. **2 Corinthians. 1:3-11.** What does this passage, which is mostly about Paul's intense suffering, teach us about hope? Specifically, why does Paul have hope and what reasons does he give us for hope? Look for as many as you can find, beyond the places where the word hope appears.
6. **Romans 12:9-13.** How does our hope, our confidence in God and His promises, relate to loving people as Paul describes here?

Work (30 - 40 minutes)

1. The sermon closed with these two solid reasons for hope, firmly based on God's promises:
 - a) Our place with Him in Heaven is secured (1 Cor. 15).
 - b) Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, God is using for our good and for His glory (Rom. 8:28).How much have you let these truths sink into your soul and affect your mindset, your interactions with others, and how you spend your life?
What kind of change in your thinking or behaviour in this area would you like to see in the future?
2. What are some of God's promises that He has used to encourage you and give you hope?
3. Have everyone close their eyes and let these words into their hearts as someone reads Rom. 15:13 as follows, or in another version:

**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.**

Baptism

We were privileged to witness and celebrate the baptism of two people on Sunday. If there are those in your group with questions on baptism, use this time to talk about why Christ-followers practice this powerful symbolic act.

Read **Acts 8:26-39.** How soon after his conversion did the Ethiopian get baptized? If you have trust in Christ, is there something holding you back?