

A LIVING HOPE: The Hope Series

September 18, 2016

Not long after the Holocaust began, a famous **Jewish neurologist & psychiatrist named Viktor Frankl**, was **forced onto a train** heading to the horrific Auschwitz concentration camp.

- He was **accompanied by his wife**, Tilly, who would soon be shipped to another camp where her life would be taken from her...
- As well as his **mother & brother**, who died at Auschwitz after Viktor was **transferred to Dachau**.

He shares his horrifying, yet inspiring story, in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, which I read for the first time just a few years ago.

- While in Auschwitz & Dachau, Frankl began to pay attention to how he and those around him **were dealing with the intense grief and pain** they were facing in the death camps each day.
- And over time, he observed **four different ways** the prisoners were responding to it all.

He noticed how some, who had been kind & respectable just a short time earlier, **began to rage**, even against the other prisoners.

- How they soon became cold & cruel... **doing whatever they could** to survive no matter how it may have impacted those around them.
- He then noticed a whole other group of people who **simply gave up**.
- It would just happen, he said,... where, one morning, even the most optimistic of their friends would simply refuse to get out of bed.
- And everyone knew that from that point on, they were on borrowed time.

Others, he said, held on to the hope that if they could somehow stay alive, they'd one day have their old lives back...

- their **freedom**, their **health**, **family**, their **professional lives**, and **wealth**.

- And yet, after the camps were liberated, so many of these particular survivors **realized that their new lives were nothing like what they left behind.**

In fact, over time it became clear to them that **no earthly happiness or revenge could compensate** them for all they had suffered.

- The disillusionment was too much for them to bear... causing many **concentration camp survivors** to take their own lives.

Frankl then discovered a far smaller group of prisoners who were able to **remain kind** throughout their time in the concentration camps...

- People who would walk through the huts comforting others, **giving away** their last piece of bread, for example.
- Of course, they *weren't "happy"*... but they were able to maintain what he called their *"inner liberty"*...
- The ability to decide for themselves what kind of person they would be **rather than allow their circumstances to mold them** into someone very different than who they were.

Frankl understood **how life in the concentration camps tore open** the human soul, exposing the depths & foundations of who we are.

- And what he discovered was that the foundation common to this **fourth group of people** (who remained kind in spite of their circumstances) were those who were rooted in hope.
- He was speaking about a future hope that isn't man made... a hope that **can't be snuffed out simply because our circumstances** have grown heavy;
- A hope rooted not in **wishful thinking** or some kind of *forced optimism*...but in a living HOPE!

He realized through all of this that, unless our lives were built on an **imperishable, living hope**, then you won't ultimately be able to handle suffering...

- and, if you can't handle suffering, you'll always struggle to handle life...
- A life rooted in anxiety and fear rather than hope.

Well, in the NT book of **1 Thessalonians 4:13**, Paul is wanting to encourage the believers in Thessalonica... that **this kind of “living hope” really does** exist,

- He says, **“And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.”**
- I want you to be **informed**; I want you to **think** about this; that, **when grief intrudes into your life**, you don't have to grieve as those without hope...
- That, because of Jesus, we don't have to bear the weight of **anxiety** or **fear** or **shame** as those who have never experienced the reality of Jesus in their lives.

You see, no matter how **bleak & discouraging** everything around you might get;

- No matter how much the future may **conjure up feelings of fear & uncertainty**;
- To whatever degree you may be carrying on your shoulders the **burden of disillusionment & despair**;
- the one who allows the **reality of Jesus's love & presence** to **take up residence** in their hearts,
- To them, **what will spring up from the parched ground** all around them is **hope**; Not just wishful thinking or forced optimism... but **real hope!**

So, through this message and this series, we're going to talk about **hope**... not the kind of “hope” that can be confused with **wishful thinking**

- or the kind of **optimism** that simply “hopes” something will turn out the way we want it to.
- Because, **real hope** is more than that. You see, **real hope is the conviction** that, because the Kingdom has broken into this world in the person of Jesus Christ, the best is yet to come...
- That **our lives are anchored to a God who has forever seated us** at His right hand in the Heavenly Places in Christ.
- In fact, the NT word for hope means **“confident expectation”**.

When John wanted to offer hope to all his spiritual sons and daughters suffering persecution, he didn't give them a pep talk.

- Instead, he shares the revelation Jesus had given him about our future life in Him.
- Not knowing if he's ever be able to communicate with them again, these are the words he chose to share with them.

In **Revelation 21**, he says, *"I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

- *I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, **"Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."***
- *And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true."⁶ And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.⁷ All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children."*

It's this hope more than anything else that enables **individuals**, and **marriages**, and **families**, and **churches** to walk in that "inner-liberty" even through the greatest of storms.

- But **when that confident expectation is lost...** when we become untethered to our present and future life in Christ,
- It's as if some kind of **spiritual fire goes out inside a person's heart**, and from that day on they're just **marking time**.
- So, how important is it to walk in hope? It's as important **for the soul & spirit** as **food & water** is for the body.
- You see, God created us to be a **people of hope...** without it, we can so easily feel like we're running adrift without an anchor.

Imagine how disorienting it can be to **loose your memories...** to **loose all sense of connection** to your past.

- Well... having no hope does the same except that **you loose any kind of healthy anticipation regarding your future.**
- And that's because **hope connects us to the future** the way **memories** connect with the past,
- It's why **Proverbs 13:12** says that the **waning of hope** in our lives, makes the heart sick.

Having been in Armenia twice this year, I've seen the impact the loss of hope can have on a generation.

- They were just being born when the Soviet Union dissolved.
- In their early years, they saw the northern half of their country torn apart by an earthquake... And then a blood war with Azerbaijan.

If you talk to someone in their 20s/30s about the future, you'll see a hint of hope as they talk about the possibility of getting out of Armenia to America.

- But, if they can't get out of Armenia... well, you can see the expression on their face turn grim.
- Over the past months, they've protested in the streets over government corruption...

They've seen Putin, who've they've put their trust in, make agreements with Azerbaijan.

- And, they've seen several hundred young men killed in April when fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated.
- Two hundred might not seem like a lot... but they're a country of 2 million.
- With Iran on their south and Turkey on their west and Azerbaijan on their east... and with the US offering little support,

The young people have simply lost hope that life will ever get better for them.

- Just **seeing the reality of hope extinguishing** in someone's life let alone in the life of a whole generation... is such a terrible thing.
- It's what the writer of **Proverbs 29:18** was describing when he wrote, "*Where there is no vision (or hope), the people perish.*"

Without being securely anchored in hope, they find themselves, more and more, drifting alone in a very dark, unhappy world.

- And yet, we read, in **Hebrews 6:19**, that **"hope is a steadfast anchor of our souls."**
- It's what **keeps us from crashing on the rocks** when the storms of life come battering down on us.
- I've seen the impact Jesus is having on them. With a **rediscovery of who Jesus is in their lives, I'm seeing hope being reignited** in her lives right before my eyes.

Maybe the future is a scary place for you. Maybe your hopes haven't always panned out.

- Maybe you've come to believe that your best days are behind you.
- Maybe your **kid is getting into trouble** and you wonder if they'll ever get back on the right track.
- Maybe you **hoped to be further along in your career** and you're beginning to lose hope of doing what you really want to do.
- Maybe **your financial burdens have gotten so heavy** that the hope you once had that things would get better is beginning to wane.

Maybe you've **made some bad choices** and you've come to see yourself as damaged goods... and that you've lost hope that you can ever be any more than that.

- Maybe you're beginning to **lose hope that an important relationship** or your **finances** or your **work** situation can improve...
- Maybe your **health has given way** long before your **spirit of adventure**.

The word Paul uses to express this, in Romans 8, is **groaning**. You see... **groaning is what people do when their hopes are frustrated & they're disappointed.**

- Like despair, that “groaning” stirs within the deepest parts of us **when we come face to face with the huge gap between where you are and where you hoped to be.**
- Paul writes in **Romans 8:22**, **“For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”**
- Not just groaning... but groaning *as in the pains of childbirth!*

I've shared with you before that, when **Joyce gave birth to our girls**, we went through a particular child-birthing approach called “The Bradley Method.”

- Now, with the Bradley method, my job was going to be **more than just keep the cup of crushed ice full.**
- You see... I was going to be her coach, which, **of course, sounded like a lot more fun** than it actually turned out to be.

Now, as a coach, one of the things they told me was that I **should never use the word “pain”**.

- So, instead of asking Joyce if she was experiencing **multiple waves of earth shattering pain**, I should simply ask, *“Are you experiencing any discomfort?”*
- So, whenever I could see the **winces of pain on her face**; Or the **sharp spikes** appeared on her monitor indicating pain;
- Or, when **drops of sweat** would fall from her brow, I knew that, as her “coach” I had an important job to do.

And so, I leaned over her a bit and, with nothing but a sincere and caring heart, I asked her... *“Joyce, are you experiencing a little discomfort?”*

- And with that, she opened her eyes and **gave me a look that could have melted Alaska!** The pains/groaning of childbirth!
- And yet, as I read the Bible, I don't think anyone experienced that groaning...
- **the aching of living life somewhere between where you are and where you want to be...** more than the disciples had after Jesus was crucified.

For 3 years **they watched in amazement & anticipation** as Jesus showed them **a kind of love & authority** they had never seen before.

- But now the unthinkable has taken place as **Jesus was brutally beaten** and was now hanging on that cruel Roman cross.
- Suddenly their **joy had been replaced with despair**. You see, **when Jesus died, their hope died with Him.**

And, with their hopes extinguished, several of Jesus' followers left Jerusalem for their village a few miles away.

- But then, in Luke 24, a **stranger walks up to them** and asks **them** why they were so sad.
- They looked at him and said... **you must be the only guy in Jerusalem** who hasn't heard what has happened.

They walked a little further... and **eventually stopped to eat**... and when the stranger (who was Jesus) asked God's blessing on the meal, they realized who was sitting on the other side of the table!

- And then, **with that confident expectation that comes from renewed hope**... can you guess what they did?
- **They turned right around** and ran right back to Jerusalem!
- **Despair sent them home**... but **hope brought them back** to Jerusalem!

It's why Peter wrote so excitedly in 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."***

- Suddenly the meaning & purpose of their lives came back into focus...
- and with that renewed hope... **joy** and **vision** and **anticipation** was stirred up inside of them like never before!

You see, it's **only when Jesus is all we have** that we really understand that **He's all we ultimately need**. The He Himself is our living hope.

- That's why, in **Colossians 1:27**, Paul describes the **"hope of Glory"** as being Christ *in* us.

- In other words, our hope can't be in our **accomplishments**, our **work**, our **presidential candidates**, **bank account**, or our **circumstances**.
- Instead... **our hope is meant to be rooted in Him**... someone whom even the grave couldn't contain.

We all know that problems are just an inevitability of life! How many here, right now, have at least one problem?

- How many are sitting next to someone who looks like they have a problem?
- How many of you are sitting next to your problem?
- The truth is that, as we all know, life really can get pretty hard at times. Paul experienced this a number of times...

In **2 Corinthians 1:8-9a**, the Apostle Paul wrote, *"I think you ought to know, dear brothers about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were **crushed and completely overwhelmed**, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we **expected to die**."*

Paul wasn't just having a bad day here... **he was in despair**... completely overwhelmed... convinced that they were going to die!

- And yet, in spite of all that was going on around him, he was reminded that his **hope should never be anchored to his circumstances**.
- But rather, the **power of hope to undo despair** in our lives is rooted solely in Jesus, who is the **object of our hope**...
- the One whom the Bible says, in Hebrews 13:5, *"will never leave us nor forsake us."*

In **Romans 15**, Paul prays for the growing numbers of believers in Rome who were, themselves, **struggling to hold on to hope** in the midst of cynicism and fear.

- In verse 13 he prays for them, *"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."*

You see, Paul's prayer for them is that, **in spite of the storms that can so quickly intrude into their lives,**

- that they would discover for themselves the kind of joy and peace that Jesus wants to release in us as we trust in Him.
- It's what **anchored Paul** when he was in despair... and it's why
- King David wrote in **Psalm 27:13**, "*I would have despaired if it hadn't been for the goodness of the Lord.*"

With all the issues facing our country today, one of the **enemies of hope** that I've seen impacting more people than ever... is cynicism.

- Cynicism, which is born out of deep disappointment or fear, is, by definition, is a "**disposition to distrust the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions.**"
- In other words, when cynicism is getting the best of us, we'll find that we're **offering conclusions more** and more about the world around us...
- how "*The world isn't fair.*" "*The future is bleak at best.*" "*People can't be trusted.*"
- Suddenly you find yourself assuming people's intent...
 - o "She did this, but only so she could get that."
 - o "He doesn't really want to help people. People like him are just in it for their own glory."
 - o "Why give to this relief work? They're just in it for the money".

So, why is this so important? Because there's this **inverse relationship between cynicism & hope that exists;**

- where the **more cynical you become the less hope** you'll able to embrace.
- That's why you've probably never met a joy-filled, hope-inspiring cynic!
- If left unchecked, cynicism will **rob you of the hope & joy & life that Jesus came to bring.**

Whenever you're most **tempted to worry**; wherever your **future looks most uncertain**; whatever might be **discouraging you**...

- Remember what Paul says in **Romans 5:5**, that "**There is a hope that does not disappoint.**"
- Your circumstances may disappoint you but not Jesus, not the Living Hope.

- You see, guys... we will all go through difficult and even painful seasons.

But we don't have to face those seasons as those **who have no hope**. Jesus is our hope! He is our hero! He is our anchor!

- Victor Frankl wrote that *“What is to give light must endure burning.”*
- And **what allows us to endure** the many trials and storms of life is Him.
- It's why Paul prays as he does in **Ephesians 1:18...**
- *“that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the confident hope to which He has called you.”*

So, how can you know and experience this kind of hope? Well, we experience it through Jesus who is our “living hope.”

- He's a **LIVING** hope because He's just that... He's present with us... He's living!
- He's a Living **HOPE** because He's the One whom Scripture says is the “Rock on which we stand...”
- a “Sure Foundation” that we can rest *not only* our entire lives on, but our eternities as well.

close and prayer

If you're here this evening and it's unclear whether you have a personal relationship with Jesus, than, you CAN know Him personally!

If you know Jesus but have lost that hope you once had, He is present here tonight to renew you again.