Acts 26 "True Hope in Hard Times"

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Just bow our heads in prayer while we stand. Father, each and every one of us needs to have more hope in our lives. And each and every one of us here, Father, need to live more and more by hope and less by hopelessness or fear or depression or despair. And so, Father, whether some of us are having a very good time in life right now or some are hard, we acknowledge at this time with our amen that every one of us needs more hope. And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that you promise in your word hope to your people. And so we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring this word of yours deep into our hearts so that more and more each of us would become a person of hope and that we as a church would be a church of hope. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. So it was a long, long time ago that I was in school. I actually have a master's degree in counseling, believe it or not. I know I say that and people wonder why I'm not nicer. But I actually have a master's degree in counseling. It's from like 100 million years ago. And I don't know what they teach nowadays in school. I have no idea. But one of the things that they were quite insistent on with us back when we were going through the training, when we had, sorry, there'd be these sessions called, I mean, you'd have not only like lectures about things, but you had to be involved in things. And then you'd have to give reports. And you'd have these things called practicums, where they talk about what you do. And one of the things that they were quite insistent on when I was going through school is that you'd be very careful. In fact, you never say to somebody, you never say to somebody, it was a very relativistic school, but this was one time they weren't relativistic. They were quite absolutist. Never say to anybody, it's going to get better. [3:08] I don't know if they still teach that. Why? You don't know if it's going to get better. Maybe their problem will get better, but they'll get cancer, or they'll be in a car accident, or some other terrible and horrific thing will happen to them. Don't tell them it's going to get better.

You don't know if it's going to get better. And I don't know if that's still part of the advice. I think it's wise advice, by the way. But the whole issue shows sort of a couple of things which that are very interesting. The fact is that we want to tell people it's going to be better when they're having a very hard time. We have a very hard time visiting somebody who's obviously consumed with hopelessness, where they just have come maybe to a position of profound apathy, a profound type of deadness. Things aren't going to ever get better. They just have like a cloud over their lives, depressed. I mean, we have a very hard time visiting people like that, spending time with people like that. And one of the really tragic things in life is because we have a hard time even being in the presence of somebody who seems to have absolutely no hope, their life is defined by hopelessness.

We end up spending less time with them, ending up reinforcing to the person who's feeling hopeless that they're right to feel hopeless, because they don't even have friends. Their friends are

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leaving them. And it's very hard for us to be with people who are hopeless. There is something deep within us to try to say that it's going to get better to give them hope. And we know, we just know that people need hope. They need hope. And even if the hopes are just very, very tiny that, you know, they're hoping that they can watch, I don't know, like their favorite TV show that night or whatever. We need hope. They need hope. It's a very important part of being human. The Bible text we're going to look at today has some real wisdom about the whole question of hope. In fact, I think the way it describes hope is something that is exactly the type of thing that people are looking for without realizing it. And it's put in the context of a story that on its surface should not be a story about hope, because it seems to be dealing with a hopeless, depressing situation that most of us, if we were in, would be despairing about. So let's have a look. We're preaching through the book of Acts, and it's Acts chapter 26. I encourage you to take out your Bibles and follow along. The words will be on the screen, but there is something about having it in front of you. I want to be a person that is open and transparent with the Word, helping you read the Word, so you can look and see if I'm taking things out of context or skipping things. That's a good thing. That doesn't bother me. It pleases me.

So let's look, and it's Acts chapter 26, and what's going on in the story is this. Paul is having a very, it's not just a hard day, week, month, it's hard years.

Because people tried to kill him about something that he was innocent for, rather than the people trying to murder him being in trouble, he got in trouble, even though he's innocent, and even though they were trying to kill him. And so he gets in trouble, and he's now been in criminal custody, like criminal, like jail, in a type of a limbo, but still in jail, still under suspicion of having committed criminal offenses, which deserve death. That's the limbo he's living on. He's been living under this for over two years now. And he still has a group of people who absolutely hate him with murderous hatred, and are in a sense waiting for him to get free. It's just like movies you see about certain types of movies, you know, where the person gets out of jail, and the people hate the person who gets out of jail, they kill him. Like, that's Paul. That's what he's looking at. And at the other hand, he's being kept in jail by these people who just should know better, and should be concerned about right and wrong and innocence, and they're just keeping them there for their own particular reasons, in one case for bribe. And he's proven time and time in gain, and actually had it acknowledged. [7:27] Just before this, the guy has had it acknowledged that Paul has done nothing deserving death. And nobody's saying, well, if he's not deserving death, why don't you just let him go? Nobody's saying that. Why? Because even the way that Paul is introduced before he speaks, as we talked about last week, it's a dismissive gesture. This man. And they're all in their finest clothes, all the pomp and ceremony in the world, and Paul comes in in shackles and chains, and the person who's over his fate dismisses him, you know, in a sense saying, this inconvenient Jew.

Causing me a problem. Here we are. Maybe you can help me solve it out. And it's in that context that Paul has to make his defense. You see what I mean by, on one level, this is not a story where you think you would learn anything about hope. But actually, it's exactly stories like this that we need to hear if we want to learn about hope. It's exactly stories like this. So let's go. It goes like Acts 26, verse 1. So Agrippa, he's a king, Agrippa said to Paul, you have permission to speak for yourself. Just sort of imagine Simon Cowell, and America's Got Talent, only with the worst thing. Okay, off you go. That's what he says. And then Paul stretched out his hand, which is like one of the things that you can see in this whole talk. If you're really a nerd into this stuff, Paul follows the, like, public oratory defense 101, and includes hand gestures, the whole structure.

If you want to geek out over it, I can tell you a commentary that'll help you geek out over it. And he goes on, verse 2, I consider, this is all part of the, you know, 101, how to defend yourself. Verse 2, I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, king Agrippa, I am going to make my defense. The word there is actually my apologetic. Those of you who are into apologetics, that's where one of the places the word shows up in the Bible. Today, against all the accusations of the Jewish elite, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jewish people, therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. Now, just so you know, there's a subtext to this, and we don't know how Paul is feeling about it, but this is the fourth time, more than four times, but the fourth time one of that lineage is in the Bible. The first time, Agrippa's great grandfather shows up. Agrippa's great grandfather is the guy who wanted to kill Jesus when he was a baby. Agrippa's grandfather is the guy who beheaded John the Baptist. Agrippa's dad is the guy who killed

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James the apostle. And now, Paul is standing before another one in that family. Once again, this is not, you know, if you're looking at the odds, the odd makers would not be looking in Paul's favor. [10:16] And just so you know, by the way, at the end of the story, he's still in jail. Just so you know, at the end of the story, he's still in jail. But he continues. Verse 4. My manner of life from my youth spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem is known by all of the Jewish people, including the elite. They have known for a long time, if they're willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion, I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial. Now, here's where the hope comes in. It's going to be said three times, usually a clue that it's important. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God. To our fathers, to which our 12 tribes hope to attain as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope, I am accused by the Jews. You'll notice there, there's the hope is said time and time again. Why? And we'll just sort of pause there. He's on trial because of a particular hope. When it says here the 12 tribes earnestly attain, and then when they worship night and day, what it's saying is that the hope that Paul has is something ancient. It's something that has endured over time. It's something that involves worship. In other words, it involves God in some way. It is transcendent. It is eternal. But at the same time, it is something imminent and personal for Paul. He stands there as a prisoner of hope. And just as an aside, you know, there's many people in our culture that if you ask them, many of you, I've said it before, there's an old feminist slogan which is, I think, really funny. And it's very useful if you just replace things. But there's an old feminist slogan that says, a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle. I think it's hilarious.

But it's a really fun phrase because, like, in many ways, our culture, they would say, I need Christianity like a fish needs a bicycle. But having said that, our culture increasingly is struggling with meaninglessness. And we plug on those meaninglessnesses with a fear or with excitement. Like, right now, maybe there's not as much meaninglessness in Canada because, you know, 80% of Canadians are united in vengeful, angry, fantasy elbow-ups around Trump. And it might, for a while, quieten the fact that there's this sense of meaninglessness. But what people in Canada really want is something not just the TikTok, Instagram, Facebook meaning and hope. They want something which is ancient. And that's what Paul is talking about. They want something that endures. And that's what Paul is talking about. They want something that is not just for the next moment or the next day, but something big, transcendent, eternal. And they want something which is very relevant and present to their life. And that's exactly the type of hope that Paul is talking about. Even though many people outside of the Christian faith, if you're here or you're watching, you don't think of Christianity, this is exactly the type of hope.
I mean, is it possible that this is, in fact, the hope you've been looking for? That's the question. Is this the hope that you're looking for? And how is it that Paul can have hope in such a hopeless situation? Now, the very next thing he does is very surprising. I think increasingly it's being lost in our culture. One of the things which is a troublesome thing in our society is that we live in little silos. And so even if there are questions, they're not real questions. There's just sort of talking points within our silos. But you don't grow as a person and you don't grow knowledge without asking good questions. And so there's a power to a good question. And Paul now asks a profound question. Look what he says in verse 8. Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? That's a great question. Why is it thought impossible that God raises the dead? Now, it might not make sense for the God of Hinduism to talk about that, or maybe the gods of paganism, or the gods of the God, which is an odd phrase in Buddhism. But, you know, if you actually just take it in its own terms, the God revealed or described in the Bible, why is it at all thought that that God, which I believe is the true and only God, that he can't raise a person from the dead? Like, why is that thought incredible?
[15:12] Now, you might think here now is where Paul is going to go and show you different reasons why that's, in fact, a completely different, reasonable thing to believe. But while we expect Paul to go this way, all of a sudden he goes this way, and a completely unexpected direction to talk about the reasonableness of this question. Look what he does, starting in verse 9. I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Now, just sort of pause. What Paul is saying here is, I was one who had a problem with this question of why can't God raise the dead, and here's the profound thing about his answer. Paul isn't saying that he didn't think it could

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happen. What Paul is saying is he didn't want it to be true. A lot of people, ask any person who's outside the Christian faith, every one of them can give you a couple of reasons why Christianity cannot be true.

But what is the deeper truth is that you and I, before we came to Christ, did not want it to be true. That's true of my life. I think it's true. I think it's what the Bible teaches.
So what Paul is saying is, like, what's the most reasonable question in the world? And then he doesn't go and give you the reasons why people think it cannot happen. He deals with the deeper heart issue of why you don't want it to be true, because he says, I was one who did not want it to be true that Jesus, in fact, had died on a cross, was buried in a tomb. On the third day, the grave clothes are there. The grave is empty. They never find the body, and people say that he's alive. And I did not want that to be true. And I did not want that to be true so much. He thought, verse 9 again, I did everything I could to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And he did this in Jerusalem. He locked people in jail. And when he says they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. What that means is when they were murdered, murdered. When we say in the Ten Commandments, you shall not murder, another way to try, the accurate, the really accurate way to understand that is you shall not take innocent human life.
And Paul says, I was taking human, I was part of a process of taking innocent human lives. Murder. And then I punished them often in all the synagogues. He'd come into the synagogue, a place of prayer, to punish people who claimed to follow, who followed Jesus. And then when it tried to make them blasphemy, the language is good, but you need to pause on it and not jump over it.
What this means is he would torture them. He would torture them. And he continues, and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.
[18:24] Now that's not the story that we were expecting. You know, once again, I can well imagine that Paul's friends, if he had any friends in there were saying, Paul, that's, you're on trial for your life, and they think you might in fact be guilty of criminal things, and they just can't prove it, and you just said to them that you're actually a miserable human being, that maybe you shouldn't turn your back on.

In fact, maybe Festus is wondering, maybe the Jewish elite have, maybe there is something going on, you know, with this. But here's the thing which is quite amazing. Paul's not in jail for any of that. He's not in criminal custody for any of that. Why he's in criminal custody? He said earlier, he's in criminal custody because of hope. Hope in the promises of God. That's why he's in criminal custody.
Some of you, in fact, might even say, a guy like this doesn't deserve hope. He deserves hopelessness. He deserves punishment. That's what he deserves. He's a bad guy.
Well, what does Paul say next? Look at verse 12. So, you know, in persecuting them even in foreign cities, that's verse 11 and 12. In this connection, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priest, in other words, the Jewish elite.
[19:57] At midday, O King, I saw on the way, that's the way to Damascus, a light from heaven brighter than the sun. Why does he think it came from heaven? Well, one of the reasons he thinks it came from heaven, it was brighter than the sun.

And it shone around me and those who journeyed with me. It wasn't just something that he saw alone, but he was traveling with companions, and every one of them saw it. And when we had all fallen to the ground, they didn't just see a light that was brighter than the star. They had what our charismatic friends, they got slain in the spirit. It's not just something that charismatics talk about. It's something which is a Bible idea, that God has the possibility to just knock you flat on your face. And sometimes he does it, just knocks you flat on your face. They're all driving, walking along, all expecting they're going to get people that they can persecute and torture in Damascus, pretty proud of themselves, even though they're filled, they think they're devout and prayerful people, but they're filled with murderous rage, consuming them. And the next thing you know, they see this bright light, and they're flat, whether it's on their faces or on their back, they're just completely knocked down. And then, amidst all of that, 14 continues, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, and here Saul is Paul's Jewish name.
Paul is his pagan name, and Saul is his Jewish name. Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Let's talk about that again in a moment. It is hard for you to kick against the goats. Really cool. Jesus quotes a Roman proverb, a pagan proverb. And I said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

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[21:49] Now, this means that Jesus did rise from the dead. That's why the grave is empty, and the body was never found.

And it's very, very interesting here. The word goads, you know, when I said he quotes a pagan, it is hard for you to kick against the goads. The goads are sticks that were used to move cattle and sheep and stuff like that, very pointy sticks. And, you know, if the animal pressed against it, the pointy stick would go into them, and it would make them sort of yelp or bellow or whatever and move forward. And I think the implication here is that underneath the murderous rage, underneath the torture, it was bothering Paul that people would choose death over denying that Jesus had risen from the dead. And it was probably bothering him, even though it looks like he had not been in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion, resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb and the grave clothes bothered him.

The lack of finding the body bothered him. The witness and the preaching of Christians, withstanding the torture, it bothered him. But his bothering, he responded to being bothered by only getting mad, more angry. Do we know people like that? Aren't we like that sometimes? The truth about us doesn't make us repentant, but just makes us double down and get more angry? Profoundly human, this text, isn't it?

Profoundly human, this text, isn't it? You know, just a bit of an aside. People say to me all the time, you know, you can't, they believe in science too much to believe in Christianity and all. But what they don't realize, often when people say that to me, they don't actually understand what the scientific method is all about. Because one of the main, one of the main parts of the scientific method is called abductive reasoning. And abductive reasoning, just means you go from facts to come up to the best explanation. And that's how Christianity works.

So the question is, given all the historical information about what, how, how is it that Jesus dying on a cross, the death of a slave for Romans and a shameful death for Jews, how did that all of a sudden have an explosion of people who believe that Jesus had risen from the dead?

[24:24] What's the best explanation for that? And the fact is, people who've looked into this seriously come to the conclusion that the best explanation for it is that Jesus actually rose from the dead. And if you go and look at somebody like Paul, what's the best explanation for the complete and radical turning around of his life?

And it's interesting to say, well, maybe he was a bit still of a psychopath. No, no, you don't, you can't say that because we actually have letters that he wrote and that he's been writing for about 15 years prior to this.

We have evidence of letters that show that he's not a psychopath. He's not a narcissist. He's not mentally ill. He's not controlled with rage. He's a completely and radically different person than he was before. What's the best explanation for this?

That's called abductive reasoning. It's part of the scientific method. It's what lawyers use regularly in courts. What's the best explanation of the facts in criminal cases and certain other types of criminal cases?

And it's a very standard type of reasoning. And the challenge is, what's the best explanation for this? And the best explanation is Jesus really did rise from the dead. And Jesus really does appear to Paul.

[25:38] Now, one of the things about facts is that facts, a lot of facts are just mere facts. You know, what is the chemical composition of water? A mere fact, although it has implications.

You know, there's all sorts of things. You know, what's the capital of Ottawa? Sort of a capital of Canada. It's sort of a mere fact. And sometimes we try to figure out the meanings of things because we're creatures who desire and live by meaning.

We feed on meaning. We live by meaning. And we live by truth. And we want to have meaning and truth be all connected. But sometimes it's not just the fact that matters, but whether there's a meaning embedded in the fact or inextricably connected to the fact. And that's what's going on here.

You see, another thing that you have to come up with in terms of trying to figure out Paul is that Paul is on jail, as you're going to see. And as you've seen, if you go through the book of Acts and other trials, Paul is in jail because he said Jesus rose from the dead.

If he had just said that didn't happen, he was lying, he would be let go and he would be free. But he won't do that. And all the historical record is he never lets go of that fact. He dies a horrible death refusing to say that he just made it up.

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[26:54] He goes to the grave saying Jesus rose from the dead. And it's not just the fact that's important, but the meaning connected to the fact, which is important. I'll explain what that means. Look what happens next in verses 16 to 18.

So Jesus says, I'm the one you're persecuting. Now, here's why.
Paul never persecuted Jesus before his death upon the cross.
So what does Jesus mean when he says to Paul, why are you persecuting me? Brothers and sisters, friends, the curious, this is the profound Christian hope.
This is the profound Christian hope that as it grips the heart, explains why it is that Christianity, as it's more and comes more and more clear to our hearts, is so profoundly emotionally satisfying.
[28:28] It's not just intellectually satisfying, and it is, but it's also emotionally satisfying. What this text is saying is that when Paul was persecuting Christians, he was persecuting Jesus.

It means that when you put your faith and trust in Christ, there are several remarkable things that happened. He came precisely for this purpose.
He lived this life and died this death and rose from the dead precisely for the purpose of you putting your trust into him. And when you put your trust in him, Jesus is God's means by which you are taken out of the realm of darkness, and you enter into the realm of light.
And the darkness is the darkness of shame. It's the darkness of sin. It's the darkness of guilt. It's the darkness of ignorance. It's the darkness of refusing to acknowledge the truth. All of those images of darkness, you're taking from that to the kingdom of light.
You are taken from the kingdom where Satan can play you like a puppet into the one where you are now under the protection and authority and the power of the triune God, where you, every single thing that you have done that is wrong, by you putting your faith and trust in Jesus, you have forgiveness from God who is involved in every act of wrongdoing, whether that's actually doing something wrong or failing to do what is right.
[29:53] And in every case, God is also involved in that offense. And every single one of those things that you were done is completely taken away. And it's not just now that you are sort of, just sort of, you know, naked and clothed, clotheless and just all by yourself alone, but you are also transferred into this other place where you are now made his.

You become his. You're clothed. You're made holy. You're clothed with Christ's holiness. And when you put your faith and trust in him, this becomes who you are.
This is why Jesus came. This is why he died and rose from the dead. This is the meaning of it. And so Paul is not only concerned about the fact, he is.
And he gives you arguments in different places. And you can see arguments written throughout the New Testament. But he's also concerned with the meaning. It's both. We need to have both. Just to make it very simple, if I was to tell you next Sunday, by the way, it was quite amazing.
I was walking down the street and I saw Josiah dragging Morris out of the Bible house. You'd go, oh, Josiah dragged Morris out of the Bible house. What a bad guy. And then I said, well, the building was on fire and Josiah saved his life.
[31:11] And you go from saying, what a bad guy to saying, Josiah, I want to buy you a beer or a coffee and hear all about it. You're a hero, right? The meaning of the act changes everything.

And so Jesus' death upon the cross is the shame of you on him. The guilt of you on him. And that is the Christian hope.
Let's just continue and then I'll rise up a few things about hope. Verse 19. Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and then in Jerusalem and throughout the whole region of Judea and also to the pagans that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.
For this reason, the Jewish elite and the Jewish mob seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.
What was the reason? Jesus is alive. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
If you put your faith and trust in him, your sins are gone. You're clothed with his righteousness.
You're God's own forever. You are the, you, you see, this is the profound thing.
[32:24] When I said all those things, I missed this part and it goes back to why are you persecuting me? It is this profound truth of union with Christ. Why is it that you can believe that God will never let you go even in hard times?

Corrie Ten Boom had a brilliant answer to this. The question is, somebody said to her, I think it was in a concentration gap, isn't it look obvious that God has let you slip through his fingers? You say

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that Jesus holds you in his hands and now he's let you slip through your fingers.
And she said that it's impossible for that to ever happen. And they said, why? I am his fingers. I am in union with Christ in such a way that he will never let me go or abandon me.
He can't. I am his. I am his. I am in him, in the most profound union. Verse 22. To this day I have had the help that comes from God.
And so I stand here testifying, witnessing both to the small and to the great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass, that the Messiah must suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the pagans.
[33:39] And as Paul was saying these things in his defense, Festus, that's the Roman governor, interrupts him with a loud voice, Paul, you are out of your mind and your great learning is driving you out of your mind.

But Paul said, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things and to him I speak boldly.
For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.
And in the Greek, Agrippa interrupts Paul and says, In a short time, would you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul, a really witty response, says, Whether short or long, I would to God, and not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for my chains.
Now here's a couple of things just in closing about hope. Paul's hope is ancient. We can now say that it's transcultural. It's a hope that believers have, whether you're in Djibouti, whether you are in Ghana, whether you are in Singapore, whether you are in Tibet, whether you are in Taiwan, whether you are in Manhattan, whether you are in Rockcliffe, or whether you are in one of the poorest areas of this city.
[35:07] It is a hope that is ancient, transcultural, trans-economic. It is enduring. It is transcendent. It is eternal. And it is a present reality.

It is, in fact, the hope that you want. And Christians here are saying something very important. Hope is not the same as optimism. In fact, in many ways, people who are most optimistic can have the most problems with hope.
What is the difference? Optimism is it's going to get better. And it's because we equate hope with optimism that when we go to people who are in a very hopeless situation, we don't know if we have anything to say to them.
But hope is not optimism. Hope is that God will always keep his promise. Hope is the virtue of believing the promises that God has made.
And God does not say, George, you will always have a perfect life. You will always have it easy. He doesn't say anything like that. He does not say that to a person who becomes a Christian in Afghanistan, or Saudi Arabia, or Iran, or one of the poorest places in the world.
[36:16] Afghanistan is one of the poorest places in the world. It is not that if you come to me, you will become healthy, wealthy. You will be like a rock star. Your Instagram page, you'll have like 200 million followers.

No, that's not the promise. The promise is that your sins are done away. The sins are that I will take you into myself, and I will dwell in you, and I will never let you go or forsake you.
The promise is that when you put your faith and trust in Christ, I will change the end of your story.
And when the story of the end, at the end of the story is changed, the whole story is changed.
If you watch a movie, and you get involved, invited by the director to have two different endings, and one of them is all about all of these struggles, and all of these fights, and going against injustice, and going against oppression, and making sacrifices, and having terrible, horrible things happen to you.
And at the end of the story, the end of the movie, one ending is that the bad guy puts a gun to your head, and puts a bullet in your head, and you die. You go, huh? If the other is, you get brought out of jail, the bad guys get punished, and the people who had a part in your rescue put you on, pat you on the back, and give you hugs, and say, way to go.
[37:37] Everything you did was so worth it. We couldn't have done this without you. You change the end of the story. You change everything in this story. And that's one of the reasons why it is so important you give your life to Christ.

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You put your faith in Christ. Is it going to mean that all of a sudden the hard things in your life are gone? It will not mean that. I can't promise you that. No Christian can promise an optimistic answer to those things.
What can I promise you? That all of your shame has been dealt with by Christ. All of your sins have been dealt with by Christ. His righteousness will now clothe you. You will enter into him by faith, and you will have a union with Christ that can never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, and that he will bring you to the end, and when you finally come to the one person who can truly speak in judgment about you, which is the creator of all things and the sustainer of all things, he will see you, and he will smile at you, and he will say, I have been so looking forward to seeing you face to face.
You can now see me in all my glory, and there will only be joy. And the other part of God's promise is it's not just something which is a declaration of the final end about you, but you have his own dear presence to cheer and to guide, as the hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness Says.
So one of the things just in closing, brothers and sisters, pray that we'll be a community of hope, that we will be men and women of hope.
[39:18] And, you know, we can have a very sinful week. We can have a week where people will bring to remembrance to us the things which we are deeply ashamed of.

And so one of the wonderful things about not only does Christ, not only does Christ do all of these wonderful things for us, but he has made his church to be a community of hope, and to have rituals of hope, to celebrate the Lord's Supper where we remember our profound hope, and that we know that even though there are hard things in our lives, we do not feed on sin, we do not feed on shame, we do not feed on guilt, we do not feed on despair, we feed on Christ himself spiritually as we have that communion.
And that we are to be a people that can cry on each other's shoulders, and uphold each other in prayer, and have high fives when things in our lives turn around.
And we can share financially when needed, to help those in our midst who need help. But in all things, we are not certain whether the economy of Canada will get better or worse.
We don't know. We don't know whether the fentanyl crisis will get better or worse. But we can know Jesus. And we can know that Jesus is the hope of the world.
[40:47] It is what the new Prime Minister needs. It is what Pierre Polyev needs. And it is what the worst fentanyl addict in Ottawa needs.

And we need to be reminded. Because all of us would like to be people of hope. I invite you to stand. Bow our heads in prayer.
Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring these profound, that your word deep into our lives, that your word would form us, that your word would be the basis upon which we stand.
We ask, Father, that these profound hopes would so become real to our hearts, that we are freed up to acknowledge when we've done wrong, and confess, and seek amendment of life, that these promises of what our end will be, that they will sustain us on those times when we are just really having a hard time.
And we ask that it won't just transform us, but it will transform us as individuals, but us as a congregation, that we will be a church of hope, that we will learn to share our lives with each other in such appropriate ways, that we can be reminded of the promises of God, and encouraged and prayed for to live out of these promises, and that we will have the rituals, and the practices, and the friendships, and the mentorships, whereby we are able to remember the promises of God, and to have them form our identity, and how we see our past, and how we see our present, and how we see our future.
[42:34] Father, build hope within us. Help us to remember Jesus. Help us to remember the gospel. And help us to pray for each other in good times and bad.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen. Amen.

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