

# Hope for a world with no hope

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] now could you turn back with me to that passage that we read in Ephesians chapter 2 and we'll read again there verses 12 and 13 Ephesians 2 from verse 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise having no hope and without God in the world but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ and especially the words having no hope and without God in the world but now in Christ Jesus walk on through the wind walk on through the rain though your dreams be tossed and blown walk on walk on with hope in your heart and you'll never walk alone you'll never walk alone well these words are very well known they were originally part of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical back in 1945 they were made more famous by Jerry and the Pacemakers in 1963 but then they were taken over by Liverpool Football Club and then also Celtic Football Club as a kind of anthem walk on with hope in your heart the trouble is that so often our hopes and dreams turn to dust our hopes crumble and we feel that we are walking alone we live in a world uncannily similar to that Roman world of the first century which Paul describes here a world without hope disillusioned even despairing a world where our hopes turn to dust quite a while back the poet Christina Rossetti wrote these lines the hope I dreamed of was a dream and now I wake exceeding comfortless and worn and old for a dream's sake

I want to think with you first this morning about a world without hope as we have it here described in verse 12 where we're told that that world of that time was having no hope and without God in the world this was the Roman world of that first century AD it had got into a situation where politically it was without hope because the dreams of a new golden age had turned to dust the Roman Empire had just recently begun the first emperor was Caesar Augustus and he was a great charismatic figure and there was a great optimism about the world of that time but he was succeeded by the morose and suspicious Tiberius and then later by the evil Caligula and Nero that have gone down as bywords for evil and so all those bright dreams of the beginning turned to dust so in the area of politics there was this feeling of hopelessness and despair in the area of religion as well in the wider Roman Empire there was the collapse of traditional formal religion there was a traditional religion of Rome worshipping the Roman gods but that was collapsing people were losing confidence in that and all kinds of mystery cults were arriving and people were believing in astrology a quote from that time says

Saturn in triangular relation to Mars means bad luck it sounds quite modern a lot of people think that the stars are going to guide them but so often there's a message of bad luck of hopelessness in the area of philosophy too at that time there was the same kind of pessimism Seneca who was a contemporary of Jesus and of Paul said evil has its root within us in our inward parts you know he came to see that evil wasn't just an external thing he came to see that it was something within human nature so that no matter what improvements were made no matter how much people were educated there was still this root problem within us as Jesus would have said he was very near the kingdom of God he was recognizing at least the first thing that we have to recognize but that in itself doesn't give any hope it rather leads to pessimism and particularly in the face of death it was a world without hope the poet

Catullus again writing about that time said suns may set and rise again but when our brief light has set one unbroken night remains again that has a very modern ring to it you could quote from various modern sources showing the same kind of thing so that was the world of that time that's why Paul is here describing it as without hope but what about our world is it any exaggeration to say that that same thing could be said of our world again going as far back as the time of the poet Byron he expressed a kind of cynical despair he said what is hope nothing but the paint on the face of existence the least touch of truth rubs it off a very despairing pessimistic point of view and then

there's the kind of fear of imminent disaster and the stupidity of people in power and leaders and so on back in the 1960s

Bob Dylan wrote a song which was called Desolation Row and that kind of sums up the whole thing but he has these lines in it the Titanic sails at dawn and everybody's shouting which side are you on he uses this picture of the Titanic you know the great supposedly unsinkable ship that was of course sunk on its maiden voyage by an iceberg he uses that as a picture of the kind of unreal optimism that people have and sailing to disaster yet everybody's shouting which side are you on the idea of just people squabbling among themselves and we see that today we see so much division in society so much lack of agreement and people are afraid because things seem to be totally out of joint Bertrand Russell who was a very famous atheist philosopher in the 20th century he said that he had to read at least one detective story a day to drug himself against the nuclear threat and of course that threat is still there and people are still concerned about nuclear weapons getting into the wrong hands and so on but today also there's the fear of terrorism there's a fear of global economic collapse there's all the fears connected with Brexit and so on so often the world seems to be a very pessimistic place a very bleak place there's the failure too of the twin traditions of science and religion

[ 7 : 37 ] Arthur Kessler who was the author of Darkness at Noon said nature has let us down God seems to have left the receiver off the hook and time is running out so both in terms of science we constantly seem to be up against problems that maybe science can't deal with or that problems that science produces so that we have all the results of pollution and all the rest of it that we've talked about global warming and all these things but Arthur Kessler ended his life basically in despair he committed suicide and in his suicide note he said I am leaving with some timid hopes for a depersonalized afterlife beyond due confines of space time and matter and beyond the limits of our comprehension well it sounds very nice words but it's empty he basically had no hope and then there's the kind of depersonalization of the modern bureaucratic and technological age and this was foreseen by a man called

Franz Kafka who was writing in the earlier part of the 20th century he wrote two famous books one called The Castle and the other called The Trial and Os Guinness the Christian writer said in the castle man is reduced to a file you know like a file in a filing cabinet and in the trial he's reduced to a case just like a legal case so it's a kind of depersonalization that exists throughout the whole of our society in many ways and people feel threatened by the growth of the computerization of everything artificial intelligence and computers and robots taking on human employment so all kinds of ways in which people fear about the future in which there seems to be so little hope in pop culture too there's that same kind of sense so often of no hope of the world not making sense it's perhaps epitomized best by the suicide of Kurt Cobain of Nirvana he said

I can't stand the thought of Francis Francis was his daughter I can't stand the thought of Francis becoming the miserable self-destructive death rocker that I become ended his life in despair and then there's a kind of what we might call a cosmic despair just a despair about the future of the universe and everything the comedian Woody Allen in his own inimitable comic style said more than any other time in history mankind faces a crossroads one path leads to despair and utter hopelessness the other to total extinction let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly in other words he's just putting it humorously that whatever path we take it seems to lead to a dead end Bertrand Russell whom I quoted earlier put it like this brief and powerless is man's life on him and all his race the sure slow doom falls pitiless and dark blind to good and evil reckless of destruction omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way for man condemned today to lose his dearest tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness it remains only to cherish ere yet the blow fall the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day again it's bleak despair in spite of the beautiful words it may talk about lofty thoughts and ennobling but that means nothing because death is the end according to him it's just darkness it's extinction and not just for us personally but for the universe the whole universe is just going to end in darkness and so supremely of course there is our fear of death

Dylan Thomas the Welsh poet said do not go gentle into that good night rage rage against the dying of the light death is the end and all people can do is rage against it to sum it all up we may put it in the words of Eomer in the Lord of the Rings film it's not actually in the book but it's a good line he says hope has forsaken these lands and that's the way it seems and we are without hope we're told here because we are without God C.S. Lewis in his book Mere Christianity said look for yourself

and you will find in the long run only hatred loneliness despair rage ruin and decay but look for Christ and you will find him and with him everything else thrown in the trouble is we are without God the trouble is we are estranged from God as it's put here in this passage we're separated we're excluded we're alienated we're foreigners we're strangers we are simply without

God we have no personal relationship with God and therefore we have no hope and why is that why is it that we are without God well we're told at the beginning of this chapter it's because of our rebellion it's because of our disobedience it's because of our self-centeredness our self-centered pursuit of pleasure and because of all that disregard for what God says God is angry with us we're told here that God is angry with us it's something that of course is not a popular theme today the idea that God should be angry we're quite happy with the fact that there should be a loving God somewhere but that God should be angry with us we resent that but of course God is angry with us because he has created this world he's created us and we have made such a mess of it and we've rebelled against him we've hurt ourselves we've harmed other people is it any wonder God is angry with us that is the source of our hopelessness we are dead in sin estranged from God in Isaiah chapter 59 verse 2 your sins have separated you from

[14:25] God your sins your transgressions have separated you from God and in the Old Testament we have someone who's the very epitome of that kind of despair remember Cain the son of Adam who because of the murder of his brother Abel he sent out from the presence of the Lord and he said I'll be a restless wanderer and fugitive on the earth so Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of wandering east of Eden and that expression east of Eden is that's the words from which John Steinbeck took the title of his book which really examines in 20th century America the same kind of theme leading to that kind of despair so we have it we have this description given in God's word of a world that is without God and without hope but that is not the end of the story that's only the beginning of the story unnecessary beginning but it's only the beginning because

Paul continues but now in Christ Jesus in verse 13 the message of the Christian gospel is that there is hope and by hope we don't mean a feeble wishful thinking kind of hope you know a kind of blind optimism a lot of people think that's what religion is it's just a kind of leap in the dark it's just believing something for which there's no evidence whatsoever but it just makes us feel better that's not what we're talking about when we talk about Christian hope it's a real hope grounded in the reality of Christ's life and death and rising again and in the reality of a real relationship with him that's what our hope is based on you see there is hope because of Jesus we know that God exists because of Jesus so often philosophers and theologians talk about proofs for the evidence for the existence of God and all of these are quite useful and quite interesting but God himself has given the greatest proof of his existence by sending his son into the world we see this amazing unique person if we read the gospels just with some kind of open mind we just see what an amazing person he is he showed love to people that nobody else would love the outcasts and the despised and he took on the people in power the religious leaders and so on and pointed out their hypocrisy he showed love and he stood for justice and truth he showed a combination of things that so often are missing in human relationships he showed forth the love of God in an amazing way and yet he died this horrible horrible death what was the explanation of it the explanation is given that it was out of his great love for us that he came into the world to deal with the root problem of our alienation from God that is our sin

Jesus reveals God and reveals the depths of his love towards us also we know that ultimately the universe makes sense because of Jesus because he is called by John in John's gospel the logos or the word you know the word became flesh and lived among us the Greek word is logos and that was a very important word in the first century it was a word that stoic philosophers used to describe God this whole idea that there was a God of reason behind everything well Jesus is that one he is the one who holds together the whole universe he is the one through whom it was created and he sustains it by the word of his power so we can have hope not only because we know what God is like through Jesus but we know what the universe is like that God has created it and Jesus is sustaining it we also know that there is a purpose to everything

God is working out his purposes in the world here in this chapter in the earlier verses there we have the whole evidence of God's choosing and planning God is in ultimate sovereign control the world is not just running according to some kind of scientific laws that eventually it is going to extinguish in darkness God is in control of it God has a purpose and out of this universe he is going to create a

new universe and so again we can have hope not just for ourselves personally but for what God is doing in the whole universe in Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 11 we are told by God for I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord plans to prosper you and not to harm you plans to give you hope and a future that's what we can know through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ but supremely here is brought out in this passage in

Ephesians there is hope because of the cross in verse 16 we read he would reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility and of course there's reference to the same thing in verse 13 the blood of Christ but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ how how is it possible that the cross the blood of Jesus how is it possible that that's really the source of all our hope well the problem that is being dealt with is the law of God verse 15 we have the law the commandments talk about and it's a problem for both Jews and Gentiles for the Gentiles they were excluded from Israel they were excluded from the covenants they didn't even have that knowledge of God's law they had knowledge of God's law in their own hearts as Paul makes clear in Romans chapter 2 but they didn't have that clear exposition of it and they were excluded they were on the outside but for the Jew also the law was a barrier in verse 14 we're told that because they could not keep those laws and we know that the law of God is good we can take the ten commandments and we can see yes they're good if a society lived by those rules things would be great but of course human beings can't keep that law so what's to be done well what's done is that the

[ 21 : 30 ] Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to deal with it but not only does the law cause a hostility between God and man because we've broken God's law and we're under God's wrath as it says in verse 3 but it also causes hostility between human beings and Paul takes the great hostility of that time between Jew and Gentile you know he talks about these two men these two humanities who were at loggerheads with one another the Jew looking down on the Gentile because they didn't have the law they didn't have the covenant and the Gentiles despising the Jews because they were so different and they were so superior and holier than thou or whatever and those kind of things continue to exist in the world all the problems caused so often by religion as we call it so many different religions and people thinking that they've got the right way and they pride themselves on thinking they have the right way and that can happen within the

Christian church and it has happened within the Christian church what passes so often for Christianity is not Christianity at all it's this idea that by our own works we're going to please God and that's the complete opposite the diametrical opposite of what the gospel is the gospel is that our works fail our lives cannot meet God's law and his requirements and yet God in his grace has done something to deal with our sin Jesus has destroyed the hostility the hostility between God and man first of all but also the hostility between human beings by his redeeming death death that is what the answer to our deepest need is he paid the price of our freedom and the price of our forgiveness and reconciliation because he did two things he fulfilled the law on one hand but he also took the punishment due to the breaking of that law on himself he fulfilled the law what we could not do he lived the perfect life expressing the perfect love and truth and justice of God but also he took on himself what we deserved the punishment due to our breaking of that law as he died on the cross and as he suffered the alienation from God that final alienation of being separated from God that we deserve when he cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me so he fulfilled the law and he took the punishment due to us on himself but in doing this he created as it's put here in himself one new man he is as

Pilate pointed out Pilate not probably understanding the real significance of his words behold the man the man the true man if we want to know what a real true human being is we look at Jesus and he has united both Jew and Gentile together because he has done away with that wall of partition that was between us caused by God's law and our inability to keep it and this is something for the whole world if we are in Christ Jesus then we're made alive and raised with him to new life as it's put in verses 4 to 6 so we who once were far away have been brought near we've been reconciled to God we've been brought into a relationship of eternal friendship with him so how can that actually be ours this is what Jesus has done for us as sinners but how can it actually be ours personally well it comes to us as it's put here in verse 8 by grace through faith it's all of grace it's a gift of God it's not salvation by works it's not our saying well we're going to do these things and this will please God no it's God has taken the initiative

God has come to us in Christ God has dealt with sin but all that is required of us is faith that is receiving it trusting it knowing that Jesus has done this for sinners we are sinners and we simply take him at his word so God has given us hope and a future through Jesus Christ he's given us hope for this life because of all the promises that he gives us he says I will never leave you nor forsake you he says though you pass through the waters they will not overwhelm you he says that he will work all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose all the great promises of God we have hope in this life in spite of the suffering the difficulties the opposition whatever it may be in face even of death itself we have hope because of the promises of God we have hope for this world also the gospel we are told by the Lord Jesus will be preached to every nation that has not yet happened it is well on its way to happening but it has not yet happened the Jewish people particularly will recognize Christ as their Messiah and that will bring renewed blessing to the world Romans chapter 11 and one day Christ will return and he will establish a new universe a new heavens and a new earth and that is the basis of our ultimate hope that we are not ourselves going to put the world right but Jesus is eventually going to put it right but as Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 if only for this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men in other words if it's just for this life and just for the future of the universe we're pretty miserable but our hope extends past death itself

[ 28 : 17 ] Robert Burns has an amazing poem called The Cotter Saturday Night it's one of his few poems where he really deals sympathetically with the Christian faith but in it he pictures a father leading family worship and he says then kneeling down to heaven's eternal king the saint the father and the husband prays hope springs exulting on triumphant wing that thus they all shall meet in future days there ever bask in uncreated rays no more to sigh or shed the bitter tear together hymning their creator's praise in such society yet still more dear while circling time moves round in an eternal sphere hope springs exulting on triumphant wing because we know that Christ has defeated death itself he rose again from the dead and so there is a life beyond death to promise to all who trust in him the Lord of the Rings has become a very famous book written by J.R.R.

Tolkien but there is within it a sort of small gem of the love story of Aragorn who's one of the heroes with Arwen who becomes his wife eventually and the time comes where Aragorn is dying and Arwen is of the elvish race who will live much longer than him but this is what he says to her in sorrow we must go but not in despair behold we are not bound forever to the circles of the world and beyond them is more than memory farewell these words sum up quite beautifully the faith that we can have in the face of death that beyond we are not bound to the circles of the world and beyond them is more than memory there is life beyond the grave because of the Lord Jesus Mother Teresa once said the greatest disease in the west today is not TB or leprosy it is being unwanted unloved and uncared for we can cure physical diseases with medicine but the only cure for loneliness despair and hopelessness is love there are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love the poverty in the west is a different kind of poverty it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality there is a hunger for love as there is a hunger for God in Jesus Christ God has provided the remedy for that hunger and for that despair so make sure that this very day your hope is in Christ Jesus that you don't remain without hope and without God in the world but in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by his precious blood let's pray  
Mikz to leave up to sit and go Ohh