

Hope - The Indelible Fact 1

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[0 : 00] Last week I talked about faith, and this week the subject is hope. I'm delighted to see you all here this week, because about every two or three weeks I decide I'll never come back.

But I figured out why. This is getting worse here. All right, there we are.

I figured out why. It's because faith is a kind of huge topic like that. You see, that's the word faith, I decided.

And here you are out here, you see, and here I am standing here with a shovel, and trying to put a little out here so you can take it with you, you know.

And what happens is I dig into here, and as I get a little way in, it just comes down and buries me.

There's just too big a subject. And what happened last week with faith, I expect, will happen this week with hope, because it's just too big to work at.

[1 : 22] But I will go valiantly on, and when you see me go under, you'll know what's happening.

Now, faith, just so you hope, it works like this, that here you are in here, and this is your life, and this is the line of progression that you're moving along.

And back here, you have to sustain you your memories of what was, which could be called history if you want.

But there it is, and here you have, in a sense, your senses. That is, you can touch, you can taste, you can feel, you can hear, you can understand.

Yeah, I know where I am right now. And that's the present. You have that, which is slowly slipping away from you, and then you have what's up here, which is your expectations.

And these expectations are, if you formulate them and put them together, they become hope. I mean, that's, your hope is, in a sense, the sum total of your expectations.

[2 : 39] That's the hope that belongs to you. You'll remember Charles Dickens wrote a book called Great Expectations. And it's not easy getting through one of his books, but I got, I think.

And if I'm right, what happened was that this young man, who came from a very poor background and had no future at all, suddenly was met by some circumstances which promised him a great future.

And he moved into the city and he started to dress as a young gentleman should dress, to live as a young gentleman should live, employed as a young gentleman should be employed. And he lived most of his life with great expectations, which were ultimately never realized.

So that he ended up being deeply disappointed. And so I think Dickens was trying to say something to us about the kind of artificial expectations on which we build our lives.

Because, you see, what's happened, I think, in our society, I mean, this is, our world is full of brilliant people with brilliant insights.

[3 : 51] And it's impossible that people who are created in the image of God should simply be fools. It takes work to get there. And some of them don't work at it very hard.

Well, some of us do. But the difficulty seems to me to be this, that you get locked into here, you lose your memory, and you don't have any expectations because what you got right now is all you ever wanted anyway.

And that tends to be a kind of contemporary philosophy of life. What you've got right now is all you need. So that hope is something that we don't give very serious consideration to as to what is, in fact, the content of our hope.

In fact, we probably avoid thinking about it because we might find out that there isn't very much there. It's sort of like a bank account that you don't want to go and see how much is there because you suspect it's not very much.

And so hope is something that we tend to not look at. I think it is used in our society largely as a palliative to make the present bearable.

[5 : 07] And if it does that, what matters if it is true or false? In other words, if it makes it better, if you have some kind of hope here, if it makes the present a little better, then it's worth having, whether it's true or false.

So that when we're talking about faith in the New Testament, you're talking about something which is categorically different than that. So that what I really would like you to do in your personal dictionary is look up the word hope and see what it says, you know, in your life.

What is it? How is it defined in terms of your life? And then I would like you to start another page and write hope at the top and redefine it.

Build a new definition for what your hope really is. Don't be afraid of it because it's all gain. Even to have a little bit of hope is better than having none.

So you can start a new page, throw out all the junk that is of no good and doesn't have any ultimate substance, and really build a new definition of the word.

[6 : 16] And what I'm giving you today, I hope will help you to begin to redefine the nature of the hope that belongs to you. You know, Vancouver was transfixed for a week or two by that gentleman with AIDS who said he would take his own life and told everybody when he was going to take it and in due course did take his own life.

And it was considered a highly rational, fairly courageous thing for him to do. And behind it, of course, had to be the conclusion that there was nothing left to the present, that there wasn't anything left here that was worthwhile, and there certainly was nothing in the future that was worthwhile.

And so the courageous thing to do was to commit suicide. And you know that a lot of modern existential writers say that, that the only serious alternative for modern man is suicide.

You know, that that doesn't help you to build much faith into your life when we live in that kind of world.

So let me start to look at hope as a New Testament word. And there's a lot of, I mean, you could spend forever on that passage that we read today.

[7 : 43] But the thing I'd like you to look at and underline if you want with the pencil in your pocket is where it says, just about a third of the way down, this is the God who calls into existence things that do not exist.

It goes on to, I don't know whether to give an example of that, talks about him raising the dead. But I really am fascinated by the fact that he calls into existence the thing that does not exist.

And then again you have in the same passage a description of what Abraham did in regard to the hope that he was given. A hope which was based on the promise of God.

And it says he hoped against hope. In other words, there wasn't anything that existed in which he could put his hope.

So that he had to depend on a God who calls into existence the thing that does not exist. His hope was based on something the substantial reality of which wasn't there.

[9 : 01] Except in the promise of God. Now you know that in our world we treat God as somebody who finished his work in six days took a rest on the seventh and basically has been resting ever since.

You know. That the thing is just running itself out and it's coming near the end. And so that what you have in the New Testament and the reason Christians pray is because God is present and God is active and God is a dimension of the circumstances of our lives.

That it's part of who we are and what we are right now. And that God is the God who calls into existence the thing that does not exist. So that the hope is not something which we can manufacture with our hands.

It's something which does not exist. But which God is calling into existence and in which he makes about which he makes promises to us which we hold on to.

And that's how faith is built in our lives is on that basis. There is a kind of radical disjunction. I don't know if you've ever been in a city like one of those big American cities where you see going right through the center of town a huge I guess Seattle will do.

[10 : 28] You go right through the center of town a huge sort of 12 lane highway. You see. And you know that it's going where you want to go. But you happen to be in one of the small streets

underneath it and it's up on a it's up on a scaffolding so to speak.

And it's zooming through. And you just can't get there because it's heading for hope. But you're down here in despair. Because you have no idea how you're going to get from here up to there. You know. And it's sort of like the situation of the man who went to the small country boy and said can you tell me how to get to this town?

And the country boy said to him you can't get there from here. Well. That's what most people that's what most people do with hope.

You know. The situation that we're in at the moment and the circumstances of our lives are such that we can't get to this place. And so we give up on hope.

[11 : 29] That's what I think is based on this passage of Romans 4. That Abraham hoped against hope. That he realized that something had to happen which is not present but which God had to fulfill in some way because God was active and his hope was in the promise of God.

And again in Romans chapter 8 it says something which is more or less similar which says that hope which is seen is not hope. You get that same sort of disjunction.

If you can lay your eyes on it then it's not hope. And most of us build our hopes on the things on which we can lay our eyes. We have some prospect.

I mean you read the you read the report of the Toronto Stock Exchange or the Vancouver Stock Exchange or anything and there you see hope.

You see it right there. Well what Paul says about that is hope that is seen is not hope. So you'd be well to go back to reading your Bible after you learned that. Because you may well be being deceived.

[12 : 43] And that's why once you have seen it it is no longer of the essence of hope. Because hope is something that has this radical disjunction from where we are.

And that's I think why why Paul says in the end of that famous chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 now abideth faith hope and love.

These three and the greatest of these is love. Well you see what a what a what a word does.

When you take when you take a word like like hope and it's just I mean it's just a four letter word but I think it is like a key.

That that is that has no reality. All that does is indicate that there is a reality which we in our history have learned to think of and to describe and we have a kind of mutual understanding that when I say hope you know what I mean.

[13 : 59] But when we look at it maybe you don't. And so that hope is is like a key and the key leads into a room that that you want to go into.

When you get into that room you are confronted with an indescribable presence. And that indescribable presence you have to in some way get control over or begin to manage it so you begin to divide it up and to think of it in in terms that you can handle that give you a kind of access to it.

And that's why you divide up these words hope faith and charity because they describe a greater reality which which is there which is God.

and when Paul says faith hope and charity these three but the greatest of these is love charity that what he's saying is that hope disappears once you encounter it.

It's no longer hope. It's no longer there. It's no longer a hope because it's real. it says once we see it dimly through a glass darkly but then we confront it and when you confront it there's no longer hope hope filled in the reality of the presence we meet which we used to describe in terms of our hope because like faith you cannot remove hope in terms of its new definition from the thing which it describes.

[15 : 42] That is the reality and when you confront reality faith is no longer necessary because there you are standing before God so faith is no longer there but love is because God is love and the reality of who he is you see God can't hope because if God was to hope what would he hope in he's the object of hope and God doesn't exercise faith but God is the object of our faith but God is love and he is and that he loves that that's why it says that love remains while these other two only serve a temporary purpose a temporary kind of situation now I still got a long way to go go I want to try and tell you a little bit more about it in these terms that if this is your house here you see there it is but upstairs there's an attic and most of us in our world have a kind of loft or attic that's never been finished the flooring on it is very inadequate old junk is stored up there that may be of some

value at some time it's no value right most the attic is locked and it's left like to suggest to you that that hope is again like that kind of attic room rarely used be furnished and except when extreme emergencies and so there it is that's hope upstairs in the attic and what it needs to be furnished with are the things that the

New Testament tells us are the furniture and furnishing of that room now when that room is furnished you know I know people I mean they might even be here one or two of but who have renovated their house and the dining room and the living room and the kitchen and the bathroom and everything were all down here and upstairs wasn't very much you know what they've done is they put the dining room and living room and bathroom down here because they look out over English Bay so they live upstairs now you know and there comes a time when the only place left for you to live is upstairs that's all you've got left is your hope and so that hope needs to be well furnished but there's a sense in which it's a bit like an illegal suite because it's in this sense how do I put it Paul when he was arrested in the when he was arrested and on trial in the 28th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles stands there and people see that his feet his legs are manacled his arms handcuffed and he's in chains and people say well why are you in chains you must be guilty of something he says yes I am I am guilty because I have a hope and I'm not allowed to in our society that hope is not allowed and because I have the hope which he says everybody should have because it's the hope of Israel it's the hope that is promised in our scriptures it's the hope that is there promised by God to us for which our people have lived through all the years of history in this hope and

I have it but my society thinks it's illegal and therefore I am in chains it's a powerful picture isn't it that he is in chains well that's because he has this illegal suite in his house which the other people say he shouldn't have that he has that accommodation which is a threat to the other people because of that hope he says he purifies himself because that's the ultimate reality he doesn't purify himself in order to get by at the present moment nobody in terms of this world thinks there's a good reason to be good because the people that are good don't get what's going and I want to get in line for what's going so I'm not going to be good and cut myself Peter says the reason that you purify yourself is because of the hope you have and that's what you really want to possess and what you have right now isn't comparable to what is promised to you so you right now discipline yourself and disciple yourself in order to possess that which is promised to you and which belongs to you now in terms of hope that's that's the difference and so you're furnished with that as well a reason your life is furnished with a reason to purify yourself in fact

Paul says that if in this life only we have hope in God you know if your religion is just something to carry you through your three score years and ten you are wasting your time you know he says if you have if in this life only you have hope you are most to be pitied because there isn't worth the commitment it demands and that's the difference that he sees in it he says further part of the way you furnish it is that from this place you can glimpse the glory of God and in glimpsing it you can I think there's a contradiction here but I'll talk to you about it after you glimpse the glory of God in the hope of sharing that is you know how how inscrutable God is you see magnificent cities magnificent seashores magnificent mountains magnificent landscape magnificent parks all those magnificent things in which

[22 : 45] God is hidden his glory is not revealed his glory sometimes breaks out for individuals who get a glimpse of the glory of God his glory breaks into history in that one event which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ when the glory of God was revealed but for the most part God's glory is hidden but from the upper room you can get a glimpse that it's there you have a sense that he's going to show it and that in a sense apprehend now the other thing is that you know that that this this room upstairs is furnished by love and the one downstairs is furnished by law and that this is where you're ultimately going to live in under a covenant of love and not under law it's sort of like this that when you go to bed at night you tend to feel that hammer on your door and wake you from a sound sleep and say you're on we've got you and most people feel that way about

God is that their life isn't in order and things aren't the way they ought to be and they haven't done what they ought to have done and all that kind of stuff and so they are expecting this hammering on the wall you see that the law will come and make its demand but your house is to be furnished by the expectation that the fulfillment is in love so instead of waiting for the thumping on the wall you're waiting for the breaking of a new day when love will replace law in the fulfillment of God's purpose so this is the kind of thing that needs to be built in to that disused portion of your life which is called

hope which is a very important place in your life I have this other thing to say whatever will I do okay let me do it as quickly as possible I'll try only to take three minutes if that's permissible here you are we've had we've tried to talk about what hope is hope is the upstairs room that you don't use and hope is this fellow here and this fellow here and the difference between them is this fellow has armor on and this fellow doesn't and if you can just remember that there's maybe no way you can tell but in the pilgrim's progress

Christian who is on the way has with him a companion who is called hopeful and hopeful and companion hopeful and and Christian come to the place where there is the king's highway is very rough and very hard on their feet and they see a stile which leads over into a pleasant field and it's called a byway and they go onto the byway they see another pilgrim going ahead of them and that pilgrim's name is vain confidence and they follow him but as night falls so does vain confidence into a pit and they hear the horror of his screams as he is consumed in the pit and they become very frightened and they stay there and the night gets darker and the storm gets worse and they think we've got to get back to the highway so they head back but they are overtaken by the darkness and they can go no further and when they get there they go to sleep and when they wake up in the morning there is standing over them a great giant of a man called giant despair and he says you are trespassing and he takes them puts them into his dungeon now this is despair and despair is the antithesis of hope it's exactly the opposite and this is the way despair works first he locks them in the dungeon he doesn't give them any food he asks his wife what to do and she says go down and work them over so he takes a great staff and hammers them and bruises them and leaves them more or less unconscious lying in this dungeon having been beaten up by despair you all know what that means well they wake up and giant despair comes down again and his wife says go and kill them and he goes down to kill them but despair suddenly loses his strength because the sun comes out and even when the sun is out despair isn't as strong as it is usually so he has this fit and he has to go back upstairs and then he comes down and he persuades them the only thing for you fellows to do is to commit suicide and he tries to persuade them to commit suicide and the difficulty is that

Christian is intelligent and he says that's a good argument and I can see why despair would counsel me to do that and his argument is reasonable and his results are reasonable so I think we should commit suicide but hopeful who was the man in the armor who is a little bit protected against that says I don't want to commit suicide I think that there are great things ahead for us but Christian can't see it but hopeful keeps him from committing suicide and they are subjected to exposure to all the bones of those who have been killed before them and then they are locked in Tuesday night Wednesday night Thursday night Friday night Saturday night and Saturday night at midnight they begin to pray see the Lord's day there we are and they pray through the dark hours of the night and the dawn comes Christian says what fool I am I have a key around my neck and that key is called promise and I think that key will unlock any door in this castle so he lets himself out of the castle lets himself out of the castle lets himself out of the castle yards and then runs for the king's highway with giant despair coming after them trying to recapture them well you see that's that is in a sense what we are we have this key which is called hope and this key can unlock the key of despair in which we tend to live our lives and lead us back onto the king's highway back into the obedience of faith and so

I hope you will take all this that I've given you and try and redefine in terms of your own life the hope that belongs to you not according to any ability that you have but the hope that belongs to you because of the God who has can call into existence that which does not exist and can give you hope where Father thank you for the wonder of your word and give us minds and hearts to contemplate that existing which does not exist that we may have some awareness of the hope that you have promised to us and the hope which we have at the present only because it is the reality of the thing that we're waiting for and we're waiting not in our own strength but in the strength which Christ's name Amen