

Pilgrim Hope: Walking with God Towards our Heavenly Home

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Date: 16 August 2015

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. And my name is Jeremy Graham. If you're visiting with us this morning, welcome. A parent once asked their child, what does hope mean?
- What does the word hope mean? And the child replied, it's when you want something, but you're not really sure if you're going to get it because you or mom might say no. So I'm asking you this morning, what does hope mean to you?
- What does hope mean to you? Because we use the word in so many ways today that it's kind of lost some of its punch, hasn't it? I hope I make it to the ferry.
- We said that a lot over our last holiday. I hope this pain stops soon in my side so I won't have to tell my wife about it because she's going to make me go to the doctor. I hope the Blue Jays win the World Series this year.
- Or more seriously, perhaps, I hope that I make it into heaven. Or I hope that my children grow up to have a faith of their own. I hope I'll always have someone to love me.
- [1 : 1 2] It's all pretty vague hope, though, isn't it? Those examples that I gave. It's wanting something, but feeling sort of powerless and feeling little control about actually getting it.
- And what about the hope that we find in things? What about hope we get from people? And we're in the middle of a season of political campaigns in Canada and America.
- And I remember a powerful image from 2008. You might remember it, too. He was not president then. Barack Obama. A poster of his picture.
- What was underneath? Hope. One word. That was the slogan. One of the slogans for his campaign. Hope in a person. Or what about hope in technology? You know, when the car was invented, people hoped that it would completely eliminate long commutes.
- Because now, you could get from point A to point B in an instant, right? Cars are way faster than walking or horses. You know what they didn't count on, though?
- [2 : 1 7] Was suburbs. And finally, what about the hope that we put in ourselves? Because isn't that our favorite one? After all, you can't just keep hoping that someone else will make a difference, will make things better for you.
- You've got to sort of seize it, take control, and do it for yourself. So most of the time, hope refers to little more than wishful thinking or goals we set for ourselves and we pursue them until we get them.
- But, when we open Paul's letter to the Philippians, and hear it read for us this morning, we get a vision of Christian hope, which is entirely different than what I've just been describing.
- And what, frankly, we all feel quite often from day to day. Paul says that Christian hope is a living reality that's based on more than what we can see or what we control in our daily lives.

And chapter 3 in the letter of Philippians is all about that living hope. And at the very end of that chapter, Paul concludes with these dramatic words that you just heard me talking to the children about.

[3 : 34] Philippians 3, verse 20. Our citizenship is in heaven. Now, it would be helpful if you all had your Bibles open with me to Philippians chapter 3 as we move through this chapter because it's here that Paul, in these words, finds the basis for hope.

And he leads us up to these verses. Our citizenship is in heaven. He leads us up to this dramatic statement by telling us three things about Christian hope. Three things about Christian hope.

First, Christian hope is personal. Second, Christian hope is practical. And third, Christian hope is powerful.

It's personal, it's practical, and it's powerful. And all of these come from the book of Philippians. So, if you have it open with me now, we'll begin with Christian hope is personal.

I think, I think we're all used to the idea of putting our hope in another person, right? I just mentioned Barack Obama and other politicians, people that we put our hopes in. But actually, Paul, in this third chapter, warns us that we're far more inclined not to put our hopes in another person, but to put our hopes in ourselves.

[4 : 57] And he calls this, at the beginning of the chapter, a part that we didn't read this morning, he calls it confidence in the flesh. Confidence in the flesh. And let me just summarize it for you.

I'm not going to read it for you. Very quickly, Paul says that in his former life as a Jew, he was an expert in practicing this kind of hope. He says he did it better than almost any man that's ever lived.

And then he says a surprising thing. And I am going to read these verses. You'll see them in Philippians chapter 3, beginning at verse 7. But, whatever gain I had practicing that kind of hope, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

He says, there's no real value in this sort of personal hope, the personal hope that I was pursuing in myself. The only hope of any lasting value and worth is to be found in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 10] To trust in the work that he has done on my behalf so that I can walk with God in a new life. Or, as Paul puts it, to be found in Christ.

To be found in Christ. Which means to walk in union with Christ. And this picture of union with Christ is the most intimate, the most intimate possible relationship of dependence and love possible in this life.

Christian hope is personal. And if I put my confidence in my own flesh, in my own ability to walk right before God, Paul warns us that it only ends in loss.

Or to express it in the words of one of my favorite hymns that we sang together as a church family this past year, it goes like this. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. And if we were Baptists, we might all stand now and sing the chorus together. On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

- [7 : 25] Christian hope is personal. It's found in a person. Jesus Christ. And second, Christian hope is practical. When Paul says our citizenship is in heaven, it's easy to think that he means Christians belong in heaven and they're not really invested in life here on earth.
- Or another way of putting that, we're too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. You've all heard that one probably. But Paul doesn't mean this at all. If you turn back with me, actually it's on the same page in my Bible at home, it's on the previous page.
- In this Bible, you'll find it on the same opposite page. Chapter 1, verse 27. Chapter 1, verse 27. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.
- Now in the original Greek, Paul literally says this. only behave as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.
- It's the same Greek word that he uses in chapter 3, verse 20 for citizenship. So our job description, Paul says, as citizens of heaven is actually to live as citizens of heaven in very practical ways in our daily lives.
- [8 : 44] Let me say that again. Paul says our job description here in the present, now, as citizens of heaven is actually to live out practically what it is to be a citizen, to behave as citizens of the gospel of Christ as we seek to love God and to love our neighbor.
- And we have time, we barely have time for one example. And the example I have for you is prayer. Now that doesn't sound very practical, does it?
- But actually, if Paul is right and our citizenship is in heaven, now, in the present tense, then prayer is the most practical display of Christian hope possible.
- Because prayer is participating in the unseen yet present reality of what God is doing in the world. Prayer allows us to say boldly, for example, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- So we behave as citizens worthy of the gospel as we pray regularly for the practical needs of our family, of our community, and of our world. Prayer is actually the most practical expression of Christian hope if we are citizens of heaven.
- [10 : 05] Which brings us to our third and final point. Christian hope is powerful. It's personal, it's practical, and it's powerful. Christian hope is powerful because Jesus Christ, the source and sustainer of our hope, is powerful.
- Look with me at Philippians 3, verse 20 and 21. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfer our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.
- The types of hopes that I began by articulating, I hope I make it to the ferry on time, or I hope I don't get sick, they don't have any punch because behind them I'm powerless to make sure they even happen.
- I can hope they happen, but ultimately I'm powerless to ensure that they happen. Christian hope is different because Jesus has demonstrated His complete power over all things when He rose from the dead.
- Look back a bit with me at verses 10 and 11 of chapter 3. Philippians 3, verse 10 and 11. Paul says, So that I may know Him, Jesus, and the power of His resurrection may share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
- [11 : 45] God has promised that one day Jesus Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. And He has the power to do this because He's been given all authority to rule and judge by God His Father.
- And when He returns, Jesus promises that He will finish the work that He started in His citizens. He will transform their lowly bodies to be like His glorious resurrection body.

And yet, brothers and sisters, even in the presence of such a hopeful promise, we are sorely tempted to keep our minds set on earthly things.

C.S. Lewis famously describes it as if we're a child playing in a mud puddle when right behind us is the sand and the sea. Paul says that for those who live this way with their minds set on earthly things, they get a glory too.

But their glory is their shame, verse 19. And their end, Paul says, is destruction. Now, boys and girls, I just want to let you know we have one minute left before I call you back up and have a look at what you guys have been working on, okay?

[13 : 02] So one minute just to wrap up what you're doing. Friends, it's simple, it's easy to simply think of hope as that feeling that you get when you really want something but you're not sure it's going to work out.

And we're all tempted to think of hope as just wishful thinking or as a sort of weakness that holds us back from actually rolling up our sleeves and working hard to get something. But Paul declares to us the good news that in Christ Jesus we are invited to participate in the living reality of a personal and practical and powerful hope that's found through Jesus Christ.

And through Jesus Christ, our citizenship is in heaven. And this is our pilgrim hope as we walk with God towards our heavenly home. So let me close by praying for us using Paul's words from chapter 1 of Philippians.

Let's pray. Our gracious and loving Father, I pray for each one of us this morning. For us as adults and for the children that are in our midst.

that Jesus who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of His coming again. Amen.