

Life defining hope

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Date: 03 December 2016

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[0 : 00] If I told you that you had to pick one aspect of your life, one thing, it could be a relationship, it could be your income, it could be your job, it could be your skills, it could be your level of holiness, whatever it is. If I told you that you had to choose one aspect of your life and right now we will lock that aspect in. I mean it will stay as it is right now and will not change for good or bad at any point in the rest of your life. What would you choose? Would it be your job?

Would it be the amount of money that you earn? Would it be the place that you're in relationally, maybe with your spouse or your kids or with your housemates? Is there an aspect of your life, any aspect at all that you go, you know what, I'm happy with where that is and I actually don't need it to go anywhere else. Now you might be kind of happy, you know like I love my wife, I think we get on pretty well but I'm kind of hoping we keep getting better at being married and our relationship keeps improving. I want it to improve, I think I get paid reasonably well, you might be pretty happy with the income that you get but you wouldn't turn down a slight increase, I mean it wouldn't hurt to have a little bit more money for a holiday or whatever else you want to do.

I'm glad that I'm good at certain things and I have certain skills but you know I'd love to get even better or learn. It's built in to every single aspect of our life, even the ones that we're happy about, is this kind of subtle discontent. It's not driving always, sometimes it is but there's this inbuilt sense that I actually want to move forward from here, I actually want the next step, it could be that it's good and you want it a little bit better, it could be that it's horrible and you want it fixed but every aspect of life we have this inbuilt perspective and understanding that we're longing for just a little bit more, just a little bit better, just a little bit happier, just a little bit nicer. We long for more, we hope for more and we actually need that hope because hope is the thing that makes it okay that even though it's good, it's not quite where we want it to be. Hope is the possibility that the things that I'm not okay with are going to improve.

We actually need that hope because it doesn't take a whole lot of looking around at the world to see that there are some problems. There's injustice, there's oppression, there's war, there's natural disasters, there's starvation, there's sickness and it's not just out there that there's problems that we sit there and go, it's got to improve, it's here as well. In my life there's pain, there's frustration, there's hurt. In your life there's relational breakdown, there's starvation.

And we need hope because hope is the possibility that this isn't all there is. Hope is the thing that protects us from despair. Hope is the thing that releases us from giving up because it just gives the chance that we could be in a better situation. And hope's not an exclusively Christian thing.

Everybody in the world needs hope. People need and want to believe that life can get better, that there's going to be a little bit more than this. And in Romans 8 that Nick just read out for us, Paul wants to encourage us that our present sufferings, those things that we're not quite happy with yet, those things that frustrate us, those things that we want to move forward, we want to change, are not worth comparing to the future hope that we look forward to as Christians.

[3 : 55] They're not worth comparing to heaven. They're not worth comparing to all the goodness that is promised in scripture. Our present situation doesn't weigh up next to just how good it's going to be one day.

But our present situation is still our present situation. It's still real. It's still the thing that you wake up each morning going, oh, I've got to go to that job again. I've got to deal with that person again. I'm not feeling well again. It's still real. It's still there. And so we need hope.

And we need it every day. And so Paul opens in verse 18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Why do we need that hope? For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. Paul tells us that it's not just us who feel this discontent, that creation itself is frustrated, that the world, the material world around us is frustrated because it is buckling under the weight of its bondage to death.

Everything that exists is trapped in a cycle of decay from the point where anything is born or begins, it begins to die. That is the weight that weighs down not just us as people but even trees, nature, forests, all those sorts of things. It is this cycle so that even the creation longs for the day, longs for the future that Christians look forward to when those who belong to God are finally and fully vindicated, fully released from this curse, from this burden.

And on top of creation, we've grown inwardly. We've kind of tasted how it's supposed to be. This is what we talked about last week. We've tasted what it is to have the possibility of punishment removed from us. We've tasted the joy of being accepted by God. We've tasted the joy of being promised eternal life, having death taken away. And so we know even more so how much this world is not how it's supposed to be. We feel it even more acutely because God has begun to open our eyes to how it is going to be. And so suddenly, not only is it just this vague sense that it's not quite right, it's actually nowhere near the picture that God is painting for us. Something better is waiting. [7 : 04] The redemption of our bodies. The removal of the effects of sin and death. I mean, already, condemnation is gone. The possibility of punishment is gone. But in the future, one day, every trace of sin, every consequence of sin completely removed from creation. One day, heaven. We've had the taste.

And so now we're aware what we're missing out on. This might not come as a big surprise to you, but I'm a bit of a soft drink junkie. And so my wife holds grave fears for our two boys. So we have an unofficial line that my son, my older son, we haven't even talked about Hudson yet, he's second. So he's bound to get a softer version. But my oldest son, Bailey, always wants Coke. He sees us drinking. Can I have some? Can I have some? No, no, no. And then we joke, you know, maybe for your 18th birthday, we'll get you some Coke or something like that. And then we're having a half serious conversation the other day. And we said, oh, maybe when he's like 10, we'll let him try some Coke. Because I'm just worried that he's going to be like me. And he's just going to drink it all the time. But Coke has brought out this ginger flavored Coke as a promotion for Christmas.

This is not cash for comment, just to clarify. Although if Coke wants to give me some, I'm not going to turn them down. And so we bought some to try it. And it was quite good. It was on the table. And Sal had this genius idea that maybe she'll let Bay try this one because he probably won't like it because it's got ginger in it. And so he said, can I have some? She goes, oh, you just give him a tiny bit in a cup. And you should have seen his eyes light up the second it touched his tongue. He was licking the bottom of his cup to try and get the last drops out of it. He was trying to wrestle my can off me so that he could continue drinking it for the remainder of dinner. And now the issue is, he knows how good it is. And so whenever I'm drinking Coke and I say, not just a vague sense of it's probably good and one day it'll be nice. He knows exactly what he's missing out on. And so the angst has increased. The answering back has increased. The attempts to steal Coke from the fridge have increased because he knows how good it is. And in a similar way, because we have been invited into God's family, because we have been forgiven, because the power of death has been taken off from hanging over our lives, we know that all the effects of death that we experience, all the effects of sin, sickness, disharmony, oppression, injustice, all these things that we've talked about, we know how good it tastes when those things are gone. And so we long for the day when they are fully and finally removed. And so in this life where they're still here, in this life where day-to-day you still have to deal with frailness, with sickness, with relationship breakdown, with your own failure, we need hope. Hope is essential. But what does hope look like?

[10 : 13] It's not that we'll no longer experience suffering or difficulty. It's not that somehow suffering or difficulty is not as serious as we thought it was. I mean the image here in Romans, I don't know if you caught it, is that it's like childbirth. Now granted I'm a man, but I can say with a fair degree of confidence that childbirth is at least a 7 out of 10 on the pain scale. I'm joking, I'm joking, it's like a 15, it's crazy, I didn't even want to be in the room. But the point being that the pain is still

real. Paul's not trying to shrink it down and go, we've got hope so. It's still there, it still matters, it's still serious. So hope's not about ignoring it or pretending it's not painful. What does hope look like? Verse 25, if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Hope is patience. That's not the same as disinterest or apathy, because we already heard in verse 23 that we're waiting eagerly. So what does eager patience look like? Well verse 26, in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. So in the same way, it's got to do with patience. In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts, that's God, knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Eager patience looks like prayer. Hope is expressed in prayer. Hope is lived out in prayer. And the crazy part about this is we don't even know exactly what to pray for in our hope and our discontent. We know things aren't the way they're supposed to be, and so we can pray, God, this sucks, and that's good, and that's right, and that's valid. But our understanding of what God will do, of what it will be like, is so partial that we literally don't even know what to pray for.

Christian hope by its nature is not seen. We don't have it yet, and we've never had it. We've got a little taste. We've got clues from God's Word in the Bible. We look forward to no hurt, and no sickness, and no pain, and no tears, but we really don't know what that will be like, because all we've experienced is hurt, sickness, pain, and tears. It sounds appealing, but we actually don't know exactly what it will be. We look forward to meeting God face to face, but none of us has experienced that before, so we've got this kind of veiled, non-detailed idea of what it is that we're hoping for, which could be enough to stifle eagerness. That could be enough for us to get distracted by some other things and think, you know what, I'm going to hope for holidays, retirement, something less. But God bridges the gap between what we know and what we need to know by His Spirit.

[13 : 39] This is the same Spirit that released us from the power of sin in the beginning of chapter 8, the same Spirit that drew us into God's family as His sons and daughters, which now intercedes for us.

He guides us in our hope. He takes our imperfect prayers and kind of sharpens them and aligns them with God's will. It's God's Spirit, so He knows what God's mind is. He knows what it is that we're looking forward to. He knows it perfectly, and so not only is He adjusting our prayers, He's slowly adjusting our hearts, slowly adjusting our desires, aligning our hearts with God's heart, so that as we pray, we're actually being given a sharper image of our hope. We won't see it fully until we get there, but what's going on here is we're praying, these imperfect, fumbled prayers that God would fix everything that's wrong, which is good and right, and the Spirit is taking those imperfect prayers and making them express God's desire.

And when someone intercedes, that's not a one-directional interaction. They go between, between us and God. So they take our limited understanding and make it a prayer that is in line with what God has designed, and then they take that prayer that they've sharpened and write it onto our hearts, so that increasingly our desire lines up with God's desire. Increasingly, our vision for the future lines up with God's vision for the future. Christian hope looks like prayer.

Prayer because we're eager, because we get this incredible vision, even in its limited bit that we see, we get this incredible vision of what God has in store, and at the same time patient, but because we have this deep confidence in the one who has promised to deliver.

But this isn't the same as fatalism either. Christian hope is distinct from the attitude of, hey, it could be worse, or hey, somebody else has it worse than me, or one thing, things will get better.

[16 : 11] Now, there's some overlap there. There's some truth in those statements, but Christian hope is more than just something that we're waiting for. It's more than that.

Christian hope actually transforms right now as well. It is future. That's what hope is by definition. It is something that we look forward to, but it's not just that.

Christian hope actually has power today. Power in your situation, in your circumstance. Have a look at verse 28. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose.

We're still in the groaning. We're still in the things that we want to change, but Paul says confidently, we know, not we hope, not fingers crossed, not it's my best guess, we know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love him.

This is one of the best known and quoted Bible verses, and it's a good one to have memorized. We love to quote it when times are tough in our own life or to people around us.

[17 : 25] But how can that be true? What do we mean when we use the word good, and we're talking to somebody who's just lost a loved one?

What do we mean when we say God is working for your good as you receive the diagnosis of cancer? What do we mean good as you hear the word that you have lost your job and you will have to work out how to feed your family and pay your rent?

Is it like relative? Do we mean, hey, it's not as bad as it could be? At least you're not starving in Africa? Or does the Bible mean, and do we mean when we say it, good is in a sense that this is positive, this is beneficial, maybe even joy giving?

What do we mean by good? Good is defined here by God's agenda. Verse 29, for those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

God's agenda is that you would be made completely like Jesus. Or from last week, in verse 4, God's agenda is that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in you.

[19 : 02] God's design, God's good desire for you is that you get transformed to the point where you're righteous enough to be able to spend all eternity in the presence of God.

That's His good for you. That you might spend all eternity in the presence of the One who is all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing, creator, sustainer, judge, source of every good gift, in the presence of the One who sent His Son to die in your place so that you might have eternity in heaven.

That is the good that God is committed to for you. That is the good that it's talking about in Romans 8.28. That's the ultimate good that gives context to everything else.

God has raised the bar on good here. I think sometimes we get criticised and maybe fairly that we use this verse unhelpfully and that we kind of, by good we mean, you know, survivable.

But God hasn't lowered the bar here so that He can use the word good. He has actually lifted it. Good is no longer defined by I've had a good week. things are good at home.

[20 : 22] And God's replaced it with I'm one step closer to heaven than I was. God's replaced it with right now, in this moment, in my pain, in my struggle, in my win, in my everything, God is here walking with me.

Loving me unconditionally, strengthening me, enabling me to keep going. Context is everything when you think about good. I've got an illustration that I use in a year six scripture lesson that I used to do annually as to try and invite kids along to Jesus mostly, but also to join church and youth. And it's about the two roads. It's a story that Jesus tells. And so I draw up on the board this kind of mountainous goat track with a fence at the front. It's hard to find the entranceway. And then this just amazingly drawn six lane highway with a big neon sign.

And ask the kids, which road do you want? And, you know, apart from the kid who knows the answer and just wants to cause trouble, everybody chooses the freeway. Because the freeway looks straight, it looks easy, there's plenty of space, no one's going to get in your way.

And that makes total sense. But you don't choose a road based on how it looks. The point of a road is to get you to where you want to go. You can't get on the M2 if you want to go to the beach.

[21 : 40] You might eventually end up at a beach, but it's going to be the long way. You choose the road that's going to take you towards the coast because that's where you want to be. That's the destination that you're trying to get to.

We've got to understand that it is a daily miracle for us to keep following Jesus. The Bible makes it clear following Jesus is the goat track.

It's the hard path. It's more difficult than just doing your own thing. It is a daily miracle that God enables us to keep going on that track. It is God's grace to us that we are able to persevere through difficulty and get that one step closer to the destination that we actually want.

It makes so much more sense if you ignore God to just take the easy road. But what we want is not an easy road.

What we want is something better than an easy life. What we want is heaven. What we want is all of the problems dealt with, not just the struggle this week. We want death taken. We want sin taken.

[22 : 50] We want sickness taken. We want pain taken. We want relational difficulty taken. God has raised the bar on good because he's given us hope for eternity. Our measure now is not how

was my week or even how was my year.

God has given us a vision, even just a partial vision, that is so good that words can't express it. We need the Spirit's help. Even our wildest imaginations keep falling short of what heaven is going to be.

And so everything from now until then needs to be measured in relation to that good, to that destination. That's why Paul says, I consider our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

They're still difficult, but they're not worth comparing. And so in the context of marching towards heaven, even difficult can be good.

When that's the ultimate good, when that's the thing that defines all other good, even painful can be good because it's taking me to the good that I need and want most.

[24 : 08] Which takes us to our last question. How do I unlock this kind of power in my life? How do I hold on to that future hope in such a way that it does transform right now?

Because it could be that right now you don't have a whole lot of need for hope. When we started, you actually had a few things in your life that you go, I'd be pretty happy if this locked in like that. I like where I live.

I like my job. I like my family. Maybe things are going well and so you don't have a whole lot of eagerness for what might be.

Or maybe you're at the other end and right now it is a struggle for you to be sitting here, let alone being told that God's working for your good in whatever's going on for you right now.

In those circumstances and everything in between, how do we unlock the power that makes right now good? That makes it possible for you to hold on to the truth that God is actively working for your good in your situation?

[25 : 20] How? Verse 31. What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? Hear that again.

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? the foundation for hope, the thing that enables you to look past your circumstance, to believe even when it's hard to know exactly what God is doing, that he is doing good, is Jesus.

It's the cross. The cross is the place where we take it not just as empty words but as the all-powerful God who is unmatched in his power expressing an unmatched love for you.

It is God who has everything at his disposal choosing to express his love to you in a way that you cannot ignore by sacrificing the thing that matters most to him so that even though you may not know how or why God is doing what he's doing in your life, you can know that it is for your good.

[26 : 51] God because why would he hold something small like your temporary health or your job or a few dollars or a restored friendship back from you when he's already handed over his precious only son?

the all-powerful God the all-powerful father holds nothing back in pursuing your good that's his agenda in transforming you to be more and more like Jesus he's taken condemnation he's taken the only thing that could stop you finishing this path that you're on in heaven and now instead of judgment to fear there's that question in there did you catch it?

verse 33 who will bring a charge against those whom God has chosen? and the answer down halfway through verse 34 no one Christ Jesus who died more than that who was raised to life is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us so the one who will judge the one who will make a decision about whether you get to that glorious hope that you want to get to that hope that has the power to transform you right now and give you joy even in difficult circumstances the only one who could say no you're not welcome says here died and rose again and now sits in heaven at the father's right hand forever Hebrews 7 says this is his forever job he sits at the right hand of God saying no no no I love them they're one of mine when you stuff up Jesus is there he's already saying to the father in that moment it's okay

I've paid for that he intercedes the judge has gotten off the judgment seat and is standing as your defense lawyer there is no judge left and so your hope is certain the hope you need to face whatever you are going through right now is here in Jesus if you lack eagerness if you've lost sight

of how good heaven is going to be then just look at Jesus and see how kind of sad and pathetic the things that you are looking forward to are in reference to him even even though you don't get it completely understand that if it cost Jesus death on the cross to purchase it for you it's going to be better come back here and begin to dream about what God has in store for you and begin to live in light of that if it's hard for you to see how

God could be being good to you right now the hope you need is in Jesus won't make the pain disappear but he will walk with you in it and he will guarantee that there will be a good outcome in it it may not be the good outcome that you want from him right now but it will be the best kind of good outcome there is it will be heaven it will be another step in the journey of preparing you for eternity in the presence of God himself the hope you need is in Jesus and lastly if you're not a Christian if this is your first time in this room or if you've been coming here for 40 years but you know you're not a Christian and you feel that discontent that we started with you feel that desire that something would be different in your life in the world around you the hope that you need is in

[31 : 07] Jesus the power to transform your life is in Jesus the one who loves you even though you don't deserve it the one who dies in your place removes condemnation and invites you into his family if you're not a Christian the hope you need not just for this life but for eternity is here in Jesus who dies in your place and forever intercedes what then shall we say in response to these things if God is for us who can be against us he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen it's God who justifies us who then is the one who condemns no one

Christ Jesus who died more than that who was raised to life is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword as it's written for your sake we face death all day long considered as sheep to be slaughtered no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for I'm convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

Amen