

Hope for the Hopeless

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Deb Gould and I am the membership pastor here at St. Paul's and am privileged to bring you this message today.

So in London, 12 years ago, there was a woman who had travelled to London to do some study in leadership. She had a Sunday free and was extremely excited that she could do a number of churches in London if she got her timing just right. If she started out very early in the morning, she could travel to All Souls Langham Place and hear a great preacher.

Then she could cut across town to go to Holy Trinity Brompton and then she could come back to All Souls and maybe go back to Holy Trinity Brompton again. But the timing had to be just so. Now, I don't know if you know London, but London in the back streets, they all swerve and curve. And this person, she thought that she could take a shortcut to ensure that she got to All Souls Langham Place with plenty of time to hear this great preaching.

But those curves and those swerves meant that she got lost and very seriously lost.

And then she didn't know if she was heading north, south, east or west and frustration would be a total understatement. Now, suddenly in her path along one of these back streets, there was an old lady who politely asked if she could be helped. But this woman who was heading off to church, she brushed the woman aside because she was in a hurry. And so the woman asked a second time, could she ask a question? She needed a bit of help? And she was brushed aside a second time because she was heading to church. A very similar story to what we heard last week with the Good Samaritan, isn't it?

[2 : 30] Now, today's passage addresses attitudes like this, where selfishness reigns and helping the hopeless is not given freely. We are on to our second last message of our Share Hope series. And today is hope for the hopeless. Now, there's an outline in the St. Paul's app if you wish to go there to take any notes. And so please, please do that. But we're going to look at two main aspects of this topic today.

What does it actually really mean to be people of hope? And secondly, how can we help the hopeless? Now, when we look at both the Matthew passage and the Romans passage today, we see the seriousness of what Jesus is saying, and we need to pay very, very close attention to that. In Romans 3, we see that there is an equal playing field, if you wish. That is, we are all sinners. No one is righteous on their own, and we do not seek God. Let's look at verses 9 to 12 in the Romans passage.

What shall we conclude then? Do we have an advantage? Not at all. For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike. But the good news is Jesus.

His life, his death and resurrection, in him, we can find life and forgiveness and faith.

[4 : 51] Hope is given to those who trust him. It has nothing to do with us. It has nothing to do with who we love and how well we love people. It's all about what Jesus has done.

Hence, no person is better than the other. And with this hope comes changed lives.

Jesus, in the Matthew passage, clearly expects to see his followers live differently. Hope brings changes. Our hope in Jesus is to drive us to something different.

Because we have forgiveness. We have grace. We have purpose, security, compassion, mercy, character, understanding, and much, much more.

As people of hope, even though there is chaos around us, we can be confident and calm in the storm because Jesus promises never to leave us nor forsake us.

[6 : 16] And when doubts of God's goodness come into our minds, we can stop and remember all that God has done for us in Jesus.

And we can hand over to him all of those doubts and those fears and those concerns and all those anxieties at the foot of the cross.

And we can remember and have confidence that if we fail to trust God in a particular situation, we can still turn to him and repent and be very confident of his forgiveness and his grace because his grace is sufficient for us.

Or alternatively, we could be people who worry and live in fear, who are anxious about the world and anxious of our day-to-day circumstances and the discrepancies that happen around us.

Are you worried about your future? Choosing not to be an authentic Christian because you're looking for acceptance from the people around you rather than acceptance from Jesus himself? [7 : 51] Or are you concerned about your finances so you choose not to be radically generous? Or are you choosing only to be the so-called righteous Christian on the day that you watch this live stream?

The question remains, Are you, am I, a person of hope? Because we have everything, friends. Everything we need, we have in Jesus. Yes, life can be tough.

Yes, you may be struggling at present financially because you have lost your job through this COVID period. Yes, there may be broken relationships that you long to have restored.

There may be uncertainty of a future or there may be health issues with either you or a loved one. [9 : 04] But we still have everything we need in Jesus. Despite all of that, we have a hope that is eternal if you are a follower of him.

Now, the tough life might be a surprise to us. COVID certainly was a surprise to us. But let me say, nothing is a surprise to God.

The test is, how are we going to live through the tough times? And where are we going to put our faith and our trust in the tough times?

Now, here at St. Paul's, we want to give this hope to those who do not yet know it. The hopeless.

We want to see justice. We want to see lives changed. We want to see people come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. But here's the thing, though.

[10 : 12] You need to be very confident of the gift from Christ that is a sure hope.

And if you waver in this confidence, you will not be able to give hope to the hopeless. You cannot give away what you do not have.

Now, you will hold on to money and possessions for yourself or your family if you do not have this hope.

You will be consumed about yourself and you will not look outwards. And dare I say, you will be in great spiritual danger.

In Matthew verse 31, we read, when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

[11 : 18] All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. The sheep are those who follow Jesus and have an eternal inheritance waiting for them.

They are the ones who obey the commands. Those who ignore the commands of God to help the hopeless are liable to be cast to the left with the goats.

Now, this needs some self-reflection. Are you a sheep or are you a goat?

Are you truly aware of your need of a saviour and you are in awe of the forgiveness that Jesus has won for you?

[12 : 34] Is your character growing into being more and more Christ-like? Is there a willingness for sacrificial and unconditional love to those in need of Jesus as Jesus would desire of a follower of his?

What I'm asking of you is this. Is for you to know where you are at this moment in time.

Are you standing in a place marked with hope? Now, you know in shopping malls and maybe at the airport two places that I haven't been too much in this COVID period but you know those directories and it shows you where you want to go.

But a key part of those directories is that there's this cross that says you are here and once you know where you are and you know the destination you want to go to you can work out how to get there.

Now, you can stand in front of a map of that nature that does not have the cross on it you could stand there all day long and see where you want to go and have no idea how to get to it because you don't know where you are at this moment in time.

[14 : 31] We all need to stop and think where am I right now in relationship to the cross.

Am I truly confident in the hope of Jesus or am I fluctuating with all that the world is throwing at me? If so what are you going to do about it? it will be different for each of us but once we know that the piece of information of where we are right now and our destination then we can determine the direction of which to go so that we can be people who have hope and we can give that to others. Now I'm going to assume from now on that we are people of hope that we are people who know who we are before Christ and then once we know that we then need to discern where to give this hope how do we discern what to do from here?

Well let's look now at how to determine where to help. The needs around our world are very great and they are everywhere.

[16 : 14] Opportunities are so grand. Situations so different. we cannot physically help every hopeless person.

We cannot physically help every ministry or every situation. That would be impossible. But we do need to start somewhere.

Whilst writing this I was reminded of an old camp song of many many many years ago and there's a line in the song that says it only takes a spark to get a fire going.

And it's a little bit like what James preached just recently. He said just do something. Just do something. Just give a spark. So let me share a principle with you that I learnt many years ago and I still follow to this day really.

And that is we need to develop a holy discontent. Now when you look at our world, our country, our community, our neighbours, what upsets you?

[17 : 40] What stirs within your heart when you see injustice? What causes tension within you?

Now I'm not talking about the sort of injustice toward you or situations where you're saying this isn't fair, I deserve better.

That's an inward looking situation. Our focus as always is to be outward looking. So I'm talking about knowing what Jesus desires, that he is for justice to reign, for God's people to stand up and to be counted, for God to be glorified and for his people to know this Jesus and the life that he gives. That's what God wants. His kingdom, justice to reign. So what small thing triggers within you a response in your belly that you start to think that is not right.

Because what you see that isn't right, let me assure you God sees and says that isn't right.

Now in our Matthew passage, Jesus mentions a whole heap of things that he expects his people to act upon.

[19 : 28] it's not if you think about it you might like to. Jesus expects this to happen. So that's you and me.

We're to feed the hungry, we're to give water to the thirsty, provide shelter to the homeless, clothe those needing clothes, help the sick, minister to those in prison.

Elsewhere he says to care for the widows and the orphans, to love your neighbour. What is stirring within your belly, I'm asking you to not ignore it.

I want you to pray about it, I want you to reflect upon it, do some investigating, some research about those situations.

develop a holy discontent. Allow God to fan within you a flame so that together you and God can develop a plan to help and to give hope to the hopeless.

[20 : 44] less. This is how grace ministry started. 13 years, about 13 years ago, well, no, actually, there was a small group who were praying individually.

We didn't know that the other was praying for years about the women working in brothels and 13 years ago, I started praying about this when I was the outreach pastor.

It troubled me that there was a need that was not being met in these establishments. There was an opportunity to show God's love to women who more than likely have never really known unconditional love.

now meanwhile there were others not just me but there were others who were also praying for a similar thing. And so all those desires and all those prayers and those different people who were praying came together and we started grace ministry.

Isn't God great? There was a holy discontent within a number of people in our church and it came together to a ministry called Grace Ministry.

[22 : 14] Now we would love to see this ministry grow. At present there is only one team that goes when we don't have COVID to go.

There are intercessors who their job is to pray for the two people who go into the various establishments. And what we take is baked goods of which the girls in these places absolutely love. We take baked goods and we say to them this is a gift because Jesus loves you and it's a token of the love that we can give.

They call us the Jesus girls. It is the holy discontent that is within us. we would love to grow this ministry because sadly within our area here at Chatswood there are loads of these establishments. So if you feel that you want to join with us and be an intercessor or be trained to go into these places we can train you.

[23 : 29] We would love to have you. If you love baking and you want to commit to baking on a semi regular basis to send goods into these places please don't hesitate to talk to me because we could have many teams visiting these places in our very own Chatswood.

Once of course the restrictions are lifted. What is it that you cannot stand the racial injustices just recently should have stirred every one of us.

Slavery of young children and adults is crying for justice. Speak to Jacob Sarkaty one of our members here at St.

Paul's if God is stirring within you to do something in this area of slavery and injustice because Jacob works for International Justice Mission which is the world's largest anti-slavery organisation. Does your heart ache knowing that there are children and families who have no food so feeding the poor and clothing those who have nothing is stirring within you.

[24 : 55] The food collection box that we have allows for you to contribute food for Anglicare our Anglican ministry that is across all sorts of areas but I'm sure they would love to have more people who have hearts seeking justice in this area.

Friends we can give money money is great money is good and all ministries need money to actually do their business it's essential but dare I say it isn't enough it's way too easy for us to hand over some dollars and then walk away and forget totally of what we have just done get involved in the ministries of which you have financially given to look for areas where you can help outside of just giving money read the newsletters that they all send out to us and learn about the people whose lives are being impacted because that will grow the holy discontent that is within you and then pray and then pray and then pray some more for these people that you are assisting and ask the

Lord what else can you do with this holy discontent now as we've heard we are raising funds for a church plant up on the gold coast and the gold coast traditionally is quite a hedonistic but beautiful but self indulgent holiday destination and there is plenty of room to give hope to the hopeless on the gold coast now Sam and Sally Lowe old members of ours with their boys made a sacrifice to go Sarah Jones an old member of ours made a sacrifice to go and assist Sam and Sally is God stirring within you to make a sacrifice to take the hope that you have to also go and help

Sam and Sally now don't get me wrong we don't really want to lose all of our members here from Chatswood to go to the Gold Coast but the thing is if God is placing on your heart a call to bless others in an area whereby they need help then of course we are going to rejoice in what God is doing for his kingdom develop a holy discontent get to know those around you open your eyes and examine what you see because I really think God wants us to see others as he sees them even when we are wayward and confused

God still pursues us with his love we too need to love others who are confused and a little wayward at times little by little you might speak to a homeless person on the street you only need a small amount of time to start developing conversations where you can get to know the person share love be real share Jesus but please note this to love is caring without an agenda it isn't that difficult if you truly know where you are at this point of time knowing

[29 : 55] Jesus you can find the direction that you need to go so if we go back to our Matthew passage I want you to see the enormity of what Jesus is saying caring and sharing hope for all these groups it is not an option we read then the king will say to those on his right come you who are blessed by my father take your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world it is an expectation of everything Jesus has done for us it was the same expectation for all

and the outcome of obedience is eternal life with him and the outcome for those who neglect the expectation to help others is eternal punishment

I mentioned at the beginning a person who was approached by a woman twice and how she continued carrying on because she was in a hurry to get to a special church service a few steps on for this woman God very severely convicted her of her sin of her lack of mercy of her lack of compassion and of her religious spirit and wrong belief that getting to a church on time was far more important than helping somebody who was in need she had no idea what this person wanted maybe she only wanted to know the time who knows but with tears she turned around to give whatever help that was needed and the street was bare the woman had gone there was not a person in sight not a person and the woman who was there a second before had now vanished was she real was she an angel in disguise

I don't know but what I do know is that lesson has will never ever be forgotten because that was me I only felt shame at that moment and it forced me to turn to my Lord and my Saviour and to ask for forgiveness it was a horrible moment for me to realise what I had done and asking for forgiveness God granted that to me and allowed me to continue on and to grow in a love and a desire to help people the memory though has been burned onto my heart and onto my mind friends do not be like me when opportunity to give hope to the hopeless crosses your path respond respond to it what do I want to leave with you today I want you to know where you are in relation to that cross and I want you to allow God to fan the flame of holy discontent within you and for you to act upon it and as you do know that you are doing it for Jesus himself because as our Matthew passage said it could be Jesus in disguise so every time a needy person crosses your path you need to be asking yourself how would I respond if this is Jesus in disguise let me pray for us

God of all love grace mercy and forgiveness please instill in our hearts a confidence in you that can weather any storm that the world will bring give us hearts after your own heart eyes that see what you see and hands that will give what you would give we pray in our saviour's name Jesus amen amen Thank you.