

Midweek Message

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

(Psalm 42:5,6 ESV)

It's not unusual for people, even God's beloved people, to have those times of despondency and distress. If you read through the Psalms, many of which are about Jesus, you'll find the authors expressing times of much apparent sadness and hopelessness. We can experience such moments in our lives during what we might say are normal times and especially now as we're in the midst of this pandemic. However, as you read through these Psalms you will also notice how the authors resolve these feelings of worry and concern which is always found in their grasp of God's continued mercy, love, and grace.

This past Sunday, we looked at the first part of “Our Living Hope” as it's written by the Apostle Peter in his first letter, chapter 1, verses 3-9. There were a number of truths that were presented in verses 3-5 that we covered and we'll see several more in verses 6-9 that we'll be looking at this coming Sunday. The thrust of Peter's message in that section is all about the hope that we have because we're now in a vibrant and loving relationship with God through His Son and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ and all He's accomplished on the cross. However, even though that's true we can still find ourselves experiencing moments of hopelessness. So, I would like to just remind us all of a few truths that I believe will help us live with hope during the crisis in which we find ourselves today.

First, the hope of which the Bible speaks is a solid expectation and not something that's whimsical, fickle, or fleeting. We often use the word “hope” in a number of different situations that are often temporary or even fanciful. For example, we might speak of our favorite sports team and say something like, “Oh, I hope they win the game today,” or we might talk about an event we've planned and say, “I hope it all works out just like we want,” or even talk about a trip we're taking and we say, “I hope we get there ok.” All of those types of statements are simply a matter of expressing our desire that the particular circumstance would turn out they way we want. The truth is we have no way of knowing the future or if all will go as we might desire. However, when God speaks of hope He's talking about something that's far more solid and is even assured because it's realized in the promise of His Word and the reality of His unchanging character which takes us to the next point.

Second, God Himself is “infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, justice, truth, which the Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us. In other words, our God is always trustworthy, always faithful, always the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Everything that God has said He would do He has done. Everything that God has promised to us will always be fulfilled. God can only be who He is and He will always be who He is and He has and will always act in accordance with who He is. That's quite a tongue twister, isn't it? However, it's true and we need to understand it because it's the foundation for our hope. People like us, who struggle with the sinful nature, aren't that steadfast or that faithful. We're quite fickle and often change the way we feel about things as well as the way we do things. However, we also need to realize that we're acting in accordance with our

fallen nature which is why we can fail one another. The Psalmist, in the verses above, places his hope in God because he knows that God can be trusted always to be who He is and act accordingly.

Third, we must realize that hope based in God's unchanging character means that whatever we face, that might lead us to a sense of hopelessness, actually has a good purpose for us. We'll see this briefly on Sunday when we get to the next part of the passage in 1 Peter. Scripture is very clear that God is intrinsically good, meaning that everything about Him is good and as such everything He does is good. Yes, even this current pandemic in which we find ourselves will bring about God's purpose, both for the church as well as for the world at large. Personally, I find that very comforting when going through difficult times. I can tell you, that from my own experience, when looking back, I have seen the goodness of God in almost every trial I've faced. Now, I do have to admit that it's easy to hope in the midst of uncertain times when we can actually see the good God is bringing in whatever trial we're facing. However, that's not always the case and we often wonder why we're having to go through a particular difficulty. That's where our faith comes into view as we simply remember that God is who God is and He will always work all things for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.

Finally, this hope of which Scripture speaks is a hope that's guaranteed. I'm not talking about some emotional feeling of hope but about the reality of genuine hope. You see, our hope is fully realized through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's through His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His eventual return that becomes the foundation of this hope of which God speaks in His Word. Looking all the way back in time to the promise of God made to Adam and Eve after they had sinned regarding the statement a redeemer would come (Gen. 3:15) and the continuation of the promise being restated over and over again throughout the Old Testament we find that it's all been fulfilled in Jesus. The only event that's left is for our Lord's eminent return when He'll consummate His kingdom and we'll live and reign with our God forever and ever. Since God has already fulfilled the first part of His purpose in the sacrifice of Jesus, who alone is our salvation, then we can rest assured that He'll keep the rest of that promise as we look to that day with Hope.

You see, the issue for us then is really about where we are placing our gaze as we continue on with this new normal. Are we looking around at all the issues we're facing and letting them get the best of us or is our gaze fixed on Jesus, that author and perfecter of our faith? I would like to close with the chorus of one of my favorite hymns that has helped me remember the wondrous hope we have in Jesus.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of Earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

Pastor Mark