

Hope

Messiah Book Room

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INTRODUCTION

There's wishful thinking, and then there's hope.

Two very different things.

Wishful thinking is based on what we wish could be, "if only....."

Hope is based on a promise that comes from the Spirit of God within.

The Lord Jesus describes it as a spring of water inside us, "welling up to eternal life."

He creates this spring in all who draw near to him.

When you drink from this spring, your life is no longer driven by wishful thinking, but by hope.

You know that the City of God is awaiting your arrival. There's a seat with your name on it at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The love, joy, and peace which you now experience as you walk with the Lord, are only an early taste of what waits for you on the road ahead.

If the Lord Jesus has already opened this spring within you, don't neglect it. Drink from it daily.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, And why art thou disquieted within me?"

Hope thou in God;

For I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

If you haven't found this spring yet, ask for it. For it is not a luxury, but essential to your life of faith.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13

THE WAY OF LOVE

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Make love your aim...

I Corinthians 13-14:1a

CHAPTER 1 - THE GIFT OF HOPE

Read: Romans 15:4-6 & 13

Sometimes we come to a place where our zeal for God is gone. Our soul is stagnant. We don't have any more strength to face things.

When we get like this it's not necessarily because we committed some gross secret sin or because we're physically exhausted. Many times this inner flatness of soul comes to us simply because we've neglected one of the basic gifts God gave us when he brought us into his Kingdom.

When God brings a man or woman to his Son and causes them to be born again of his Spirit, that person immediately is given three gifts - basic to every other gift talked about in scripture.

First, that person is given **faith** - the power to see the unseen and hold on to it.

None of us has ever seen Jesus with these eyes of flesh. Yet, there are people reading this who are going to willingly die for his name because they have faith. Of course, to keep this gift you have to do something with it. If you don't exercise faith it gradually fades.

Secondly, God gives to the believer the power to **love** other people the way God loves.

Love is of God and he who loves is born of God and knows God.

What the believer does with this power to love determines whether he grows up into the likeness of Jesus Christ or whether he degenerates into an empty shell, a fruitless branch that will be thrown into the fire.

But there is a **third gift**, a very important and often neglected one –

The Gift of Hope

- The power to look forward and see the goal.
- The power to hold that vision of heaven even when we have to walk through absolute darkness.

Like the other two gifts, this gift of hope has to be nurtured, cultivated, exercised.

If you lose your hope, your faith and love will soon go down the drain too.

Many of us have a shaky faith and a dubious love in our hearts because our hope is sick, because we have allowed our vision of the glory that lies ahead to fade.

When Christian, in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, got to the Cross and the burden rolled from his back, he was given a scroll with writing on it which he was to read as he traveled to the Celestial City. This scroll was his hope.

While Christian was climbing up the Hill Difficulty, he stopped at an arbor half-way up and went to sleep and the scroll fell out of his hand. He woke with a start, the day was almost spent and he hurried up the hill. As he got to the top two men came running toward him and warned Christian that there were lions up ahead that would tear him to pieces. It was then that Christian reached into his coat for his scroll and it was gone. Without that scroll, without this hope Christian knew that he couldn't face the lions. So, he climbed down the hill to the arbor where he had fallen asleep and looked until he found his scroll.

This is exactly what many of us need to do. Somewhere along the road we fell asleep and our hope dropped out of our hands. We need to go back and find it. We won't get anywhere until we do.

Don't underestimate the gift of Hope which God gave you. For it's not hope in some dream that will vanish like vapor, it's hope that is anchored to a glory that will still be shining when the heavens and the earth have passed away.

Christ in you, the hope of glory.

1. When you have this hope within you, it keeps you from settling down in this world.

You have seen a vision of God's Kingdom that makes you an alien and an exile in this world. Now you see everything in this world as temporary and passing.

Everything:

- Your home.
- Your job.
- Your family.
- Your own body.

When friends beckon you to come and settle you just have no heart for it. How can you be content with this vale of shadows when you have seen glory? So you press on. You're on your way to a better country. You're seeking a city whose builder and maker is God.

2. When you have this hope within you, it keeps you from getting discouraged.

You can't be discouraged when you see glory up ahead.

People think that they are discouraged by their circumstances. That's not true. They are discouraged by the absence of hope. When we lose our scroll we can be discouraged by a gust of wind.

On the other hand, when we have that scroll, tragedy after tragedy can come crashing against our lives and somehow we keep going.

Many of us have been careless with this gift of hope.

- We have allowed the vision God gave us to tarnish.
- We have taken our heart off the vision and let our heart wander around down here in the shadows.
- We have lost our scroll.

Ah, but how good God is! The minute we start looking, He helps us to find it. In Bunyan's story, Christian knew that it was God who helped him find his scroll so quickly.

And how quickly Jesus restored hope to the despairing Peter.

***Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?...
Feed my sheep.***

When Stephen was about to be stoned to death, the Spirit pulled back the veil and enabled Stephen to see glory.

"Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

And that vision of glory sustained him even as the rage of an angry mob closed in on him and killed him.

So God sustains our hope by enabling us to taste glory again and again.

- It's not a feeling.
- It's not a matter of sight or touch,

but a beholding with our spirit, in the blazing light of God's Spirit, the Christ who is the hope of glory and who is in us.

1. We need to be tasting glory in the scriptures.

"...that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of scriptures we might have hope."

Many believers haven't begun to taste glory in the scriptures. They're missing the most important reason why the scriptures have been preserved to us. The scriptures are the witness of ordinary people like ourselves, weak people, selfish and sinful people, whose lives had never-the-less been visited by God's glory and changed by that glory.

Whether you're reading the testimony of Moses, Isaiah, or the Virgin Mary, or Peter, in every case glory from beyond this world came to them. The glory of the only begotten of the Father somehow broke into their darkness and spoke to them. And when you open this book and read the witness of these people, their word is confirmed.

The same Christ who shone upon them starts shining upon you afresh.

You enter their world and you find yourself looking out across a timeless gulf and beholding the glory of the living God shining down on his Son and blazing out to you and quickening your whole being.

When you go to the scriptures daily - and I doubt if a person is serious with God who doesn't go to them daily -

don't be satisfied,

- until you start tasting glory,
- until you begin to breathe the atmosphere of heaven,

as you read the testimony of the prophets and apostles of the Lord.

2. We need to be tasting glory through harmony with brothers and sisters around Jesus.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus.

- Harmony with brothers and sisters around Jesus is always a foretaste of glory.

- Disharmony is always a warning of hell.

How few Christian homes and how few fellowships of believers live in harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus. An occasional half-hour of harmony sandwiched between days and weeks of tension,

resentment,

gossip,

bickering,

grudges,

suspicion.

No wonder we lose our vision!

Do you doubt that God will give us the power to live in harmony if we make the slightest effort to get off our high horse and repent of our stubbornness?

Do you doubt that God will help us live together and work together as brothers and sisters under the cross if we are willing to conform our own lives to the mind of Christ?

Either we live in harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus or we give up whatever vision of glory we ever had. We lose our hope.

Now if your brother or sister is hard-headed, that's his problem and he will have to do something about it. But your brother's hard-headedness will never destroy your hope. If your hope is being destroyed, it's your hard headedness, your jarring spirit, your evil attitude.

And, it's not a matter of making pacts with each other, not a matter of endlessly airing our dirty linen in front of each other. It's not a matter of some new technique for probing one another's life.

It's a matter of deciding that whether my brothers are nice to me or not, I'm going to line my heart up with the heart of the Lord and deal with my brothers and sisters according to the mind of Christ.

The minute I do, I begin to taste glory. A stream of glory begins to flow with healing effect through the Body.

3. We need to be tasting glory in unified praise.

....that together you may with one voice glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course it's impossible to praise God with one voice when our day-to-day living with each other is marred by discord. But once we're making an effort to live in harmony around the Lord, then we get tremendous help and encouragement by praising God with one voice.

When Peter and John are released from prison in Acts 4 and come back to their friends, we read that the believers

"lifted up their voices together to God and said....."

Then follows a beautiful prayer.

Did they pray this prayer in unison?
Did one man pray?

How was it done?

It doesn't matter. The point is that they were together with their hearts and it rose to God from all of them together as if it came from one voice.

And as this happened, glory visited them and renewed their hope.

When the eleven disciples sang a hymn with Jesus before going out to Gethesemane, it rose as one voice. They were one in their praises of God around their Lord - a final touch of heaven to help them as they went into the most terrible night of their lives.

We need to come out of our stiff self-conscious compartments and really worship God together. And, as we do,

- we taste heaven,
- our vision is renewed,
- our hope is restored.

The believers and fellowships that will survive the days ahead will be those whose faith in Jesus and love for one another are held to-

gether by a blazing hope, who have their scroll in their hand and read it as they travel on toward the City of God.

The word of the Spirit to each of us today is that we need to renew our vision by constantly tasting glory.

- **We need to be tasting glory in the scriptures.**
- **We need to be tasting glory through harmony with each other.**
- **We need to be tasting glory by worshiping God with one voice.**

God will help us find our scroll

if we really start looking for it.

CHAPTER 2 - THE TWO SIDES OF HOPE

So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 13:13

It is true that the greatest of these is love, but it's also true that the power to love will not be with us long if faith withers or if hope dies.

So faith, hope, love abide.....

If the greatest of these is love, we often think that the least of these must be hope. Surely in our lives the most neglected of these is hope.

It's almost as if hope is a luxury ... "it's nice to have it, but if it disappears we have to get along without it." Many of us have been trying to exercise faith and manifest love in our daily lives, while hope in God, which was once our constant companion has shriveled to almost nothing. We have resigned ourselves to a kind of vague depression, like a dull spiritual headache that you get up with every morning thinking that perhaps as the day wears on it will go away.

But to be without hope is really to be without a purpose, without a goal, without anything to look forward to. So you get through the day as best you can.....

- take care of the business at hand,
- look after the kids,
- pay the bills ... eat... sleep,
- talk about hockey, politics, babies or cars,
- watch some T.V.

and wait for something to happen to relieve the monotony.

But once we've had some vision of the kingdom of God, some taste of the glory of Jesus Christ, to sink back into this aimless drifting is like being in the vestibule of Hell itself. And if we remain in this state very long whatever faith and whatever love we have will soon be gone too.

Just as surely as the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus, and just as surely as the Spirit causes the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts, the same Holy Spirit fills us with hope. And this gift of hope is essential to us if we are to fulfill our purpose in this world and endure in God into the next.

Hope has two sides: 1. God's side, 2. Our side.

**GOD'S SIDE IS TO GIVE US HOPE AS A GIFT.
OUR SIDE IS TO KEEP THAT HOPE AIMED AT GOD**

AND AT NOTHING ELSE.

On God's side, God sends us his Son to be our hope.

... "The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:12-13

Why do you think Peter left his fishing boat and everything familiar ... forsook all to follow Jesus?

Peter's first response to Jesus was not faith or love, but **hope**. Jesus was the first real hope Peter had ever seen. He knew there was more to life than just catching fish and sitting around in the evening swapping stories.

"Fear not, from now on you'll be catching men."

At last Peter was given hope of entering a life that made sense and had purpose...a life burning with the life of God.

Everywhere Jesus went he gave people hope.

- Hope for the lame.
- Hope for the blind.
- Hope for the hungry.
- Hope for the dead.
- Hope for the most hopeless sinner.

And every one of us who has come into the knowledge of Jesus Christ has experienced this hope. It was like the doorway to a new life... a fresh beginning ... like falling in love. We began walking with Jesus and every day was a new adventure, a joy. We were looking forward to the City of God at the end of the journey. We were looking forward to the work of God we were to be part of each day. And the Spirit of the Lord refreshed that hope and kept it alive in us all along the way.

But then somehow our eyes of hope, which at first were only for the Master, began to turn and look to other things as well. Now I begin to put my hope in a particular person who has come to mean so much to me ... my friend,

my leader,
my child,
my husband or wife.

Or I attach my hope to some enterprise I'm part of

my church,
my business,
my career,

my dream of success. And now I'm doing what the people of Israel did in their wilderness journey.

The God who had been their hope as they passed through the Red Sea to freedom, and had remained their hope as they followed the cloud and the pillar of fire, is now put aside for a golden calf.

When we mix our hope in God with hope in some golden calf we end up disappointed ... things don't work out the way we'd hoped they would. And after we've had two or three of these disappointments or fifty or a hundred — we develop a fear of hoping in anything.... a superstitious belief that whenever I hope something will turn out good it always turns out bad.

"It doesn't pay to hope," we say.

But the problem is not that we made a mistake by hoping, the problem is that we misdirected our hope. We allowed it to drift from God to some golden calf.

Our side of hope is to make sure it's never aimed at an idol, but always at God.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God. Psalm 42:11 KJV

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?"

Many of us have allowed our superstitious fear of having any hope to undermine our hope in God.

"You never know what God might do. It's best not to hope at all."

But it was not God who disappointed our hope. It was the golden calf ... the distorted ideas of God ... which we knew were distorted when we accepted them.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?....

If there's any exhortation we need to listen to and act on its this one ---

HOPE IN GOD*

Hope in God for the unfolding of his purpose in each day, whether the day seems bad or good as we look out the window. What a difference it makes if we approach it hoping in God. God made the day.

He gave it to us.

He's in it.

And his desire toward us in this day is nothing but good. The fruits of our Lord's death and resurrection are waiting to be gathered in this day. Even

the disruptions and disappointments become our friends when we meet them hoping in God.

We need to hope in God for the working out of his good will in answer to our prayers. We're praying to him about that wound, that heartache, that person we love whom we're worried about.

What a difference when we pray in hope.

- How can we pray in faith
... if we have no hope.

- But if we pray in hope,
... we'll soon have faith.

And we need to hope in God that we shall soon see the face of Jesus as we reach the end of our journey.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.
I Corinthians 13:12

I am, says God, Master of the Three Virtues,

Faith is a faithful wife,
Charity is an ardent mother.
But hope is a tiny girl.

I am, says God, the Lord of Virtues.

Faith is she who remains steadfast during centuries and centuries.
Charity is she who gives of herself during centuries and centuries.
But my little hope is she who rises every morning.

I am, says God, the Master of Virtues.

Faith is she who remains tense during centuries and centuries.
Charity is she who unbends during centuries and centuries.
But my little hope is she who every morning wishes us good day.

I am, says God, the Lord of Virtues.

Faith is a soldier, a captain holding a fort, One of the King's cities, In the borderland of Gascony, in the borderland of Lorraine.
Charity is a physician, a little sister to the poor.
Who nurses the sick, who nurses the wounded,

The King's poor, in the borderland of Gascony, in the borderland of Lorraine.

But my little hope is she who says, "how do you do to the poor and the orphan

I am, says God, the Lord of Virtues.

Faith is a church, a cathedral rooted in the soil of France.

Charity is a hospital, an almshouse which gathers up the miseries of the world.

But if it weren't for hope, all that would be nothing but a cemetery.

I am, says God, the Master of Virtues.

Faith is she who watches during centuries and centuries.

Charity is she who watches during centuries and centuries.

But my little hope is she who goes to bed every night and gets up every morning and really sleeps very well.

I am, says God, the Lord that Virtue.

My little hope is she who goes to sleep every night, in that child's crib of hers, and having said her prayers properly, and who every morning wakes up and rises and says her prayers with a new look in her eyes.

(from God Speaks by Charles Peguy.)

Pantheon Books

The Holy Spirit is with us now. And among his many blessings he is giving us as a gift fresh from heaven, is a new measure of hope.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13

The gift is given now we have to do something.

If we will take all the superstition and all the fear of expecting anything good from God, and push it out of our hearts; and if we will fix our hope on God, and keep it fixed there,

that hope will be followed by faith and by love to a degree we have never known.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. Psalm 42:11 KJV

CHAPTER 3 - OVERCOMING HOPELESS SITUATIONS

Everybody on this earth has to deal with their share of hopeless situations ... hopeless in the sense that it can't work out the way you want it to.

If your car throws a rod in the middle of nowhere at 2 in the morning in zero weather, the hope of getting it running again that night is futile...all you can do is try to flag down a ride to safety.

If your restaurant business is thousands of dollars in the hole and nobody will give you any credit, you may have no choice but to close down the restaurant.

If a woman has a husband who refuses to get help for his problem and abuses her and the children every night when he comes home from the bar, she might have to take the children to a safer place before one of them gets killed.

Our normal approach to a situation, once we've concluded that it's hopeless, is to get out. The ship is sinking, here's a lifeboat, for goodness sake let's get in it and shove off.

But once we've come into the Body of Christ and share in the life of the Kingdom of God, our whole idea of what a hopeless situation is and what to do about it has to change.

***"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock (your confession) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."
Matthew 16:18***

If there's any place that's hopeless, it's the place called Hades, the region of the dead.

When the rich man landed in Hades whatever hope he had was soon drained out of him.

"Father Abraham, please send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue."

- "Sorry, it can't be done."

"Then please send him to my father's house to warn my brothers about this place."

- "Sorry, it wouldn't do any good. If they aren't listening to Moses and the prophets, they wouldn't listen to a man returned from the dead."

....."***I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*** My church will crash those gates ... my church will conquer the kingdom of hopelessness. It will specialize in overcoming hopeless situations."

The wedding feast at Cana was a hopeless situation. They'd run out of wine....so Jesus turns the water into wine.

The night of fishing when Peter caught nothing was a hopeless situation. So Jesus says, "***Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch,***" ...he's never seen so many fish.

The widow whose only son was being buried was in a hopeless situation. He was her only means of support. There was no Social Security. So Jesus says, "***Young man, I say to you arise.***" And the dead man sat up and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother.

On Good Friday the disciples of Jesus were in a hopeless situation. They had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.... Now he's dead. ***On the third day Jesus came and stood in their midst alive from the dead and said, "Peace be with you."***

"On this rock I will build my church and the gates of death will not prevail against it."

When the Body of Christ is about the business it was called to, it's always down in the valley of the shadow, ramming it's way through the gates of death, overcoming one hopeless situation after another.

This was the thing which baffled the Pharisees ...and still baffles them.

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Why does Jesus forever hang around with the hopeless people of Hopeless Alley? Because that's what he came to do! He came to overcome

- the hopeless situation of sin,
- the hopeless bondage of death,
- the hopeless tyranny of Satan, the accuser.

The problem with us is that we still haven't caught on to the fact that the hopeless situation is to be our normal environment ... not so that we can walk around and moan, but so that we can conquer it and move on to another one. Instead, we still tend to react as sons and daughters of Adam.

- When the situation looks hopeless we either try to run away or we hrow up our hands in despair and sink.

If we're in a hopeless situation and we're satisfied that it's not because of our own rebelliousness, then we need to see that the Lord himself put us into this situation for one reason:

- to overcome it,
- to conquer it,
- to break those gates of death,
- to throw down those strongholds of Satan.

Jesus stood on the brow of the hill, looked down over Jerusalem and wept. Beneath him was a hopeless city. It had killed the prophets of old, rejected every messenger God had ever sent.

How Jesus had longed to gather its people together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings! But they refused. So what does Jesus do? Walk away? No, he goes straight into that city and offers himself as the atonement for its arrogant sin.

Jesus entered the temple. It was polluted with the smell of animals being sold, corrupted with the clink of money, hot with the atmosphere of greed ... a hopeless situation ... the House of Prayer degraded into a den of thieves. Does he walk away? He goes, straight into that situation and conquers it.

And we are called by Jesus to do the same thing.

To go straight forward into the hopeless situation and overcome it.

"Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Don't let Satan give you a hard time, you give him a hard time!"

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.... II Corinthians 10:3-5

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life; which is in the paradise of God. Revelation 2:7

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death. Revelation 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna. Revelation 2:17

He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations. Revelation 2:26

- Conquers what?

Conquers the lie of hopelessness ... the lie that to survive in this world we have to compromise with evil.

- To demolish that lie.
- To break through those gates of death.
- To destroy those strongholds of Satan.

So, how do we do it?

First, we overcome the hopelessness within us by exercising our faith in Jesus.

Notice that before our Lord preached one word or performed one healing, he first dealt with hopelessness at the door of his own heart in a wilderness battle with Satan.

"Are you sure you're the Son of God? How do you know you're not just another insane man.

If you're the Son of God command these stones be made bread ... jump from this pinnacle ...

Take charge of this kingdom of the world, I'll let you have them if you'll fall down and worship me."

And in each case Jesus confessed faith in his Father and overcame Satan.

In a similar way we're now overcoming Satan in the wilderness of our hearts by confessing and living faith in Jesus.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? I John 5:4-5

- The victory that overcomes the spirit of hopelessness, which is this world, is our faith in Jesus.

So you wake up in the morning feeling hopeless....already it looks like another dead-end day. You overcome this hopelessness by turning the heart away from the darkness and toward the light.

"Jesus, you are the light of the world. You are the light of my life. You are my hope. I do not step into this day alone, I step into this day with you. And in your name I take charge of my own heart and refuse to let it be troubled or afraid."

We overcome the hopelessness within us by faith in Jesus.

Second, we overcome the hopelessness around us by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, even if we lose our lives in the process.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." Revelation 12:10-11

We conquer the hopeless situations around us by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony.

The thing that makes these situations hopeless is the presence of Satan in them. Where Satan is present, death is present, sin is present, lies abound, fear rules the atmosphere. Drive Satan out of that mess and immediately hope returns.

And there are two things that will drive Satan out of any situation;

1. The blood of the Lamb.
2. The confession that Jesus is Lord.

So we point to that blood, reminding Satan that he can't stand the sight of it or the thought of it. That blood forces him to admit his defeat at Calvary. Nor can Satan stand the simple confession that Jesus is Lord.

- He gets upset.
- He gets violent.
- He starts playing dirty.

- But he will be defeated by that testimony.

When Jesus turned over the tables of the moneychangers to give testimony to his Father's holiness, he knew it would cost him, but he also knew that he would conquer.

When Jesus headed into Jerusalem to give testimony to his Father's mercy, he knew it meant laying down his life but he also knew he would conquer.

We will conquer,

- when in Jesus' name we quit being scared,
- when we love not our lives even unto death,

and we begin to give a word of testimony to the world around us, even if it means rejection, even if it means danger or death itself.

Far too long we've allowed the hopeless situations in which we find ourselves to turn us into a hopeless people.

God help us to conquer these hopeless situations.... casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to obey Christ.

**God help us to break through those gates of death
and set the captives free.**

CHAPTER 4 - IN THIS HOPE WE ARE SAVED

In the 14 years or so we've been conducting services down at the Bancroft Convalescent Home I can't remember a time when the Spirit of God was shining on the faces of the people the way it was that past Wednesday.

The room was filled with souls who had long since been bypassed by the mainstream of life in this city.

Women without legs.

Men with palsy.

Folks with twisted minds.

There was a relatively young man there who had been crippled by a stroke and could hardly enunciate words and he prayed at the top of his lungs, "God bless my wife and six kids."

As we sang Amazing Grace there wasn't a mouth in that room that wasn't wide open. I heard voices that I had never heard before. And they sang with such joy it just made you want to weep.

With their natural eye, all they could see was confusion and loneliness and chaos, but somehow by the grace of God's Spirit, these forgotten souls were able to penetrate through into the realm of the unseen and take hold of the coming glory.

And as they sang God's praises Wednesday afternoon, they were no longer in the stuffy, confused, noisy, chaotic warehouse for broken bodies and shattered minds.

They were standing on the banks of the Jordan looking across to the Promise Land which they knew was there. They were crowded at the doorway of God's banquet. And they were looking into the future where they could see ... the woman with no legs leaping for joy in a glorified body and the man who could no longer support his wife and six children standing once more with transfigured arms raised toward the throne and the little lady who won't let anybody touch her running around hugging everybody and the man who never smiled beaming with the smile of the Son of God.

For a few minutes Wednesday afternoon these people were permitted to see beyond this valley of pain to the high plateau of glory toward which they knew they were going.

They were lifted up out of themselves by hope.

They were having renewed to them the only vision in this world that makes life worth living; the vision of the New Creation...that sweet and blessed country toward which these people are moving through every weary day.

Don't pity these people. These people know something that many of us have yet to learn – that this world has been subjected to futility by God and that every-

thing in this world is vanity and that if we sink our hearts into anything this side of heaven, sooner or later they are going to be broken and undone.

These people know.

They've learned already a lesson that many of us have not yet learned – that in order to pass through this world without losing the Blood Bought Joys of the next..

we not only have to have faith and
we not only have to have love
we also have to have hope.

Without God-given, God-inspired hope that reaches out and takes hold of the Coming Glory, that sees the City of God far off and settles for nothing less and that keeps going no matter what----

---without that hope, we are forever being distracted by joys that burn right out as soon as we get them in our hands or we're forever being defeated by despair.

Look at all the wrecks that are strewn along the road that leads to the City of God and ask yourself,

"What made them turn aside?"

"What caused them to give up?"

"Why did so many of them just plain lie down and die?"

The reason is that they let go of the hope that was planted in their hearts when God called them to follow his Son.

They turned aside from that blessed hope that God gave them and began taking hold of lies which seemed closer,
more attainable,
and more real.

The hope of glory is burning in every star.
Glistening in every drop water.
Whispering through every blade of grass.
Thundering in every ocean wave.

There is not a living creature, not even a stone, that doesn't already have throbbing in itself the knowledge that the best that we now see is nothing but a shadow of the glory which is waiting for those

who are ready and
who are waiting and
who have their eyes set and their hearts fixed.

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay to obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; not only the creation, but we ourselves, who had the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."
Romans 8: 19-25

Now we wouldn't be stumbling into the errors,
and the vanities,
and the sins,
and the slavery that we get ourselves into and that beset us all the time, if we would obey our God's command not only to have faith, and not only to love, but also to hope.

"Why art thou cast down, oh my soul? And why art thou disquieted with-in me? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God." Psalm 42: 5

The hope that we're talking about is not wishful thinking,
not self-deception,
not some little game that we keep playing with our minds to keep them from falling apart.

The hope that we're talking about originates not with man, but with God.

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope..."

So that when God subjected this sin-stained corner of his universe to futility, when God permitted man to reap the consequences of his rebellion and the universe with him, he did it in hope.

He did it knowing that out of the ashes of this ruined world would rise, a new creation bought by the blood of the lamb.

And when it says that God hopes, it doesn't mean that he bit his nails, and paced the floor, and wished.

It means that God knew things would look bad now, but that there will be an end to this valley of shadows.

"Out of this darkness I will bring forth light.

Out of this race of rebels I'll bring forth a race of sons.

It will be. I will bring it to pass", says the Lord.

When a man or woman is born of God he is saved in that hope.

He reaches out and takes hold of a reality which he cannot see, but which he knows is there better than he knows his own name.

By faith he takes hold of a day still to come:

when the mourners will be comforted,
and the meek shall inherit the earth,
and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled,
and the merciful shall obtain mercy,
and those who are pure in heart shall see God,
and the peacemakers shall be called the children of God.

(We taste these blessings now, but soon they will be ours in fullness forever.)

He reaches out with his heart, with his hope, and takes hold of that hour when the Lamb of God, who has already taken away the sins of the world, will come back from the Father's throne and judge the nations, and destroy every lie and the fruit of every lie, and will raise his beloved ones out of their graves and out of their corruptible bodies into incorruptible glory, and then he will take the creation itself out of its bondage to decay into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God.

When we say we have that hope, it doesn't mean that we wish, it means that we know. Therefore we anchor our lives in this hope....

We live and die for the hope of coming glory,

If we live and die for the hope of the coming glory, how in the world can we let ourselves be caught up and dragged down into the temporal, passing, superficial goodies of this world and all those lies that Satan keeps jingling and jangling off to the side to distract us?

"Why art thou cast down, oh my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

To hope in God means three things:

1. To "hope in God" means to take hold of God's future, not my future.

My future is a dream that can be smashed in a minute.

It can be snuffed out with an accident, a war, an earthquake, or even one false step at the wrong time.

But God's future - the thing God promises, the kingdom, which God reveals - that thing is solid.

- If God says that Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled, that's what's going to be.
- And if God promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled,
- If he promises us that there is coming a day when every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus, so it will be.
- If he offers a kingdom to those who trust him and obey him, that's what will be.

As we reach out and take hold of those promises with our hearts, with the hope which God has put in us, a stream of blazing light flows back from the coming glory and fills the present moment with eternity. And the blind receive their sight.

And the lame walk.
 And the lepers are cleansed.
 And the deaf hear.

If we take hold of that glory, by hope, then the signs of God's kingdom come back from that glory into this moment and touch our lives, so that the alcoholic among us today quits drinking. And if we take hold of that hope, the addict is set free. And the troubled conscience is given peace.

All we have to do is take hold of that hope now and we change now.

2. To "hope in God", means to let go of the visible.

"For who hopes for what he sees."

If you can see it with your natural eye: whether it's a Cadillac, or a mansion, or new career, it's not worth pouring out your life to get it. It's not worth hoping for.

And so we deliberately begin to let go, with our hearts, of all those vanities that we've been holding onto and reaching out for and thereby make room for hope in God to vastly expand within us.

Our Lord tells us the same thing:

"Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." Matthew 6:19

That which is visible — is temporal. It's going to pass away.

Only that which is unseen — is eternal, and will remain.

And so we deliberately discipline ourselves to let go, with our hearts, of the things that we can grab hold of and see.

And as we do, the things, which are unseen and eternal, are going to come rushing in and fill us and change us.

3. To "hope in God" means that we wait for that thing we're hoping for with patience.

He says, **"If we hope for we do not see, we wait for it with patience."**

Patience that never gives up.

Patience that gets up every morning and glorifies God for his wonderful promises, no matter what we see.

Patience that keeps fighting its way right through the lines of the enemy to God.

Patience that keeps moving toward that glorious City of God, no matter how rough it gets.

And we can be patient.

And we can wait with patience, because we know that what we're waiting for is in no way tied to the things that are visible.

So that no matter what the visible tells us, even if everything we can see and, touch and, hear and, feel screams at us that there is no use - we still wait.

Because our hearts are fixed on the unseen.

Because we know that there is a day coming soon, when the light, which already shines in our hearts by the Spirit, will be blazing around us.

And those things, which always seem so solid, will be gone. Vanished as in a dream. And the unseen glory of the unseen God, will break forth as the dawn of a day that will never end.

God grant that we may be found worthy, by the blood of his Son, to enter into that day and may he keep us in this hope until it comes.

CHAPTER 5 - SOARING HOPE, SOLID CONFIDENCE

**"Now faith is being sure of things hoped for, certain of things not seen."
Hebrews 11: 1**

**"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though a host shall encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war shall rise against me, in this I will be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."
*Psalm 27: 1-4***

***"I would have fainted, except that I believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."
Psalm 27: 13***

These words in Psalm 27 are the testimony of a man who was certain about the presence of God in his life.

He could not reach out and touch the Lord with his hands.
He could not see the Lord with these eyes.

But he knew that the God of the universe, was guiding him.

"The Lord is my light."

"The Lord is my salvation."

***"The Lord is the strength of my life
of whom shall I be afraid?"***

This certainty is what kept this man from fainting when the storms of hell broke loose over his life.

"I would have fainted, except that I believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

What was it that enabled the man who found treasure hidden in the field to go out and sell everything he had to buy the field if not the certainty that this treasure was in fact, the one thing in all the world worth having?

He's sure of it!

He doesn't sell everything he has with trepidation.

He does sell everything he has **with great joy because he's sure of the treasure.**

What was it that enabled Andrew, Peter, James, and John suddenly to walk away from their fishing boats, families, everything - to follow Jesus, if not the certainty that Jesus had the treasure worth losing everything to get?

Soon they discovered that Jesus himself was the treasure.

The woman at the well came to draw water.
After talking with Jesus
she left the empty water jar
ran back to town, announcing,

"Come and see a man who told me all I ever did. Is not this the Messiah?"

She was certain that she had found the Messiah.

This certainty, this soaring hope, this wonderful confidence that enables people to shout, "This is what I want! This is the one thing that matters! I am prepared to lose everything else to have it!" marks the life of every man, woman, and child who comes into the kingdom.

This is the certainty that enables us to get up on the road of the kingdom and start moving.

This is the certainty that enables us to say, "Good-bye" to all the clutter and buy the field that holds the treasure.

This is the certainty that enables us to forsake our fishing boats to follow Jesus.

Certainty is not some rare gift, which God imparts only to a few in every generation. This is a gift which God gives freely to all who draw near to his Son.

Certainty is the mark of the normal Christian.

Without it there is no discipleship.
There is no vision.
There is no life.

But from earliest times, people have tried to ignore the fact that this certainty is essential. Perhaps we taste it for a while, and when it fades, we think that we have "matured."

How often we catch ourselves thinking, "Yes, there was a time when I knew...when I was sure that Jesus is alive from the dead and guiding my life. I

knew it! But now it seems as though I'm going through the motions while secretly asking, 'Do you really believe this stuff?'"

But how can we present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God?

How can we worship him and praise him unless we are sure?

How can we take the Sermon on the Mount and turn it into action....

loving one another,

living with purity,

truth,

justice,

mercy,

in our daily relationships with people, unless we're dwelling in the House of God, beholding him, receiving life from him?

"One thing that I desire of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple." Psalm 27: 4

Unless I'm living in his presence, it's impossible to live this life.

"But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured the hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourself have a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

'For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.'

But we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and keep their souls." Hebrews 10: 32-39

What an awesome thing! These people had compassion on the prisoners and joyfully accepted the ransacking of their houses, because they knew that they had a better treasure.

As long as they had this treasure, they were rich.

And who could strip them of this treasure?

"Now faith is being sure of things hoped for, certain of things not seen."

Certainty is the rock bottom essential of our life with Jesus.
Without it we are powerless.
But where do we get it?
And how do we maintain it when we have it?

We receive it and we maintain it by hearing, constantly hearing,
a living word directly from the Lord Jesus.

"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you, they are Spirit and they are life."

His words, received and obeyed, create faith. They bring certainty.

On the evening of the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he gathered his disciples together for their last meal together.

During the meal he got up, laid aside his garments, wrapped himself in a towel, got down and washed their feet like a slave.

After he sent Judas on his way, Jesus gave the disciples their final instructions, beginning with these words: *"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me."*

Believe. Be certain.

Not a week has gone by since it first took place that this feast hasn't been re-enacted somewhere.

As we gather in his name to eat and drink the bread and the wine, the Spirit of the Lord comes into our midst and speaks the same words to us:

*"Let not your hearts be troubled;
believe in God, believe also in me."*

Believe. And as he speaks these words to us, he imparts the power to believe enough to obey them.

He says to us, be certain be certain of four things:

Be certain that the Father knows you by name.

Be certain that the Father has called you into his kingdom.

Be certain that my death and resurrection have broken the curse over your life.

Be certain that the gift of the Holy Spirit is now being renewed within you.

If you are certain of these four things, you will *"mount up on wings like eagles. You will run and not be weary, you'll walk and not faint."*

Nothing can cause you to fail.

First of all, be certain that the Father knows you by name.

"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me! Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord thou knowest it all together. Thou has beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Psalm 139:1-6 KJV

It staggers our minds to even think that the God of the universe should know each of us by name, but he does.

And this becomes the basis of it all.

Everything that Jesus did and taught begins by getting hold of this truth

that God knows us.

"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Again and again it's the same message,

I see you.

I know you.

I understand.

I know what you're going through.

know who you are.

When we are certain that God knows us by name, then we can say,

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Secondly, be certain that the Father has called you into his kingdom.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and ordained you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide." John 15:16

Jesus said these words to the disciples in the upper room at that Last Supper and now he says the same words to us ... ***"You didn't choose me, I chose you and ordained you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain."***

"I've called you into the kingdom and I've given you work to do."

When you eat the communion feast, realize that you are sitting at table in the kingdom; you are sitting, so to speak, in a chair with your name on it.

He put that name there.
That's where you belong.
He called you to feast,
and now he calls you to get to work.

There is work for each one of us in the kingdom.
Yes we are saved by grace, but that same grace puts us to work.
We labor in his name.
We enter the harvest.

You may say, "Oh, but that's the hard part for me. I've never been able to finish anything I start. I'm a klutz. I stumble. I fail."

All this changes when your eyes focus on Calvary.

So, thirdly, believe and be certain that the death and the resurrection of Jesus have broken the curse over your life.

Yes, there was a curse. Sometimes we still feel it, when everything seems to go wrong. What is this cloud of confusion and defeat which hangs over me?

When Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden that was a curse.

God didn't do it. They did it to themselves.
By their rebellion they locked themselves out of Paradise.

There is indeed a veil separating the human race from God. That separation cuts us off from our only true source of life. It makes us vulnerable to the powers of darkness. It blinds us to the reality of God's world.

But when that veil opens up, and we walk through, the curse is broken. We're free.

We can accomplish things we could never do before.

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us

through a curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19-22

Be certain that veil is open for you, and in that certainty go through, stand with Jesus before the mercy seat and start worshipping God,

and the curse of sin,
guilt,
death,
bad luck,
failure,
defeat is over!

**Be certain of this.
Confess it.
Live it.**

Finally, be certain, that the gift of the Holy Spirit is being renewed within you.

If you asked for the gift of the Holy Spirit, you received it.

And if you haven't asked for the gift of the Holy Spirit, do it now. Pray with faith.

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more of the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

And after you have asked, don't sit around waiting for bells to ring and the rainbows to pop in the sky, just know... if you asked for bread, you didn't get a stone.

If you asked for the gift of the Spirit, this is exactly what you have received.

The same Spirit that was given to the believers on the day of Pentecost is being given afresh to us and to others like us all over the world.

Jesus says to us, "Receive the Spirit. Live in the Spirit. Walk in the Spirit."

You will do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

"Faith is being sure of things hoped for, certain of things not seen."

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

God has done everything from his side to put the kingdom into us.

He sent his Son.

Took him to the cross.

Raised him from the dead.

Lifted him back to his side.

Sent the gift of the Spirit.

All these things and the power they represent become actual in our personal lives, and in our corporate life, when we believe, when we trust.

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me."

Be certain that the Father knows you by name.

Be certain that the Father has called you into his kingdom.

Be certain that the death and resurrection of Jesus have broken the curse over your life.

Be certain that, even as you read these words, he is satisfying your thirst with a fresh measure of the Holy Spirit, making you more than a conqueror through him who loves you.

CHAPTER 6 - HOPE WHICH NEVER DISAPPOINT S

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. Romans 5:1-5

When Paul said that, "*faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love,*" he never implied that we could do without the other two. We know that we can't survive without faith, but we often underestimate the importance of hope.

And yet if we look back over our lives we can see that the prelude to nearly every fall we've ever taken was the disappointment of a hope. When our hope sank it wasn't long before our faith, and our love, sank with it.

On the other hand, as long as our hearts carry a clear hope, our faith and the love of God which comes with it can survive any storm.

The basic ingredient of the life of faith in this world is a hope which is never disappointed. It begins when our hearts first awaken to the hope that God does care.

- He will change us.
- We can come out of this hell we're in.

It springs to life when we look up and find the Lamb of God really there, calling us by name.

"Come - follow me."

And all along the road, through trial, through suffering, through whatever cross we have to carry or whatever death we have to die, hope is there ... new every morning. No matter how many things go wrong, God-inspired hope keeps leading us on and never disappoints us.

It is only in this inner atmosphere of hope that the love of God can be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

But while this hope never lies and never lets us down, there is another kind of hope which also rises in our hearts. A hope which creates very attractive pictures in our minds ... better known as fantasies ... and raises our expectations that these desirable things can be ours. How often we pin the whole purpose of our lives on these attractive pictures and make them our hope. Then one day we wake up bitterly disappointed.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked... Genesis 3:6-7a

How did Eve see that this tree was good for food and to be desired to make one wise? She saw by means of a hope which mushroomed in her mind under the influence of the Father of Lies. Just looking at the tree filled her with hope ... but what kind of hope? Just looking at the bill board, the centerfold, or the interesting person coming into the room fills us with hope...ah, but what kind of hope?

Then she and her husband ate. And instead of hope being fulfilled, their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. For the first time in their lives Adam and Eve experience shame, fear, disappointment.

There are people who enter into marriage with a hope which is utterly unrealistic — expecting a fulfillment marriage was never meant to give. And soon the thing turns into a hell on earth ... each mate blaming the other for their disappointment because their coming together was based on a false hope.

We can even attach to Jesus the wrong kind of hope. John the Baptist did. John expected Jesus to play a role he was never meant to play.

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

cried John as he introduced Jesus and stepped back into the shadows. But when Jesus remained the Lamb and kept the Lion aspect of his nature sheathed in mystery, John began to lose hope. ***"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"***

And many of us have been pinning some hopes on Jesus which simply are not in his gospel.

- We're looking for something from him which is going to put us in a place of power or prominence.
- We're expecting Jesus to vindicate us before our detractors.

- We're waiting for him to bring our enemies down from their high places and exalt us in this world.

And when it doesn't happen after years of waiting we lose hope. And when this hope dies, false misleading hope though it was, we begin falling prey to some strange temptations.

One of the clearest examples in scriptures of what happens when our fleshly hopes are destroyed and our hearts give way to a spirit of disappointment is Lot. You'd think Lot would have trembled with awe and fallen on his face in worship after being delivered from Sodom by the skin of his teeth. But Lot's behavior after his rescue is the sure sign of a disappointed heart.

- Lot's wife is gone.
- His possessions are gone.
- His sons-in-law are gone.

So Lot and his two daughters abandon themselves to three temptations that invariably visit a disappointed heart.

Now Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters. And the first-born said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. And on the next day, the first born said to the younger, "Behold I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. Genesis 19:30-37

1. Lot and his daughters withdrew into a cave. And how often in our disappointment we head for a cave.

"I'm going to withdraw. I'm going to bury myself in my own thing. I want nothing more to do with all the people who hurt me and rejected me."

2. Then Lot got drunk. His daughters kept filling him with wine and he didn't object.

"What the heck! Might as well. Everything's let me down."

And so we tend in our disappointment to escape into a world of unreality,

alcohol,
fantasy,
some hobby,
some foolish obsession.

3. Then they went to bed. A reckless abandoning of themselves to something unholy ... a pathetic attempt to find relief in the sensual. And how often the disappointed heart runs to the sensual to nurse its self-pity and even strike back at God.

"After all, he let this happen to me so why shouldn't I?"

Whenever we find ourselves,

- running for some cave,
- escaping into the unreal,
- plunging into the sensual,

as a way of compensating for our disappointment, we can be sure that our hearts were fixed on the wrong hope in the first place.

Our Lord never sympathizes with our dejection after our false hopes have been destroyed. Always, he points us firmly to that place where our true hope is...where our hearts ought to be fixed: **on himself**.

"Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." Matthew 11:4-6

"Get your eyes on me and don't take them off until you see who I am and what I'm doing for you."

And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" *Luke 24:17-32*

The picture of these disciples is a picture of us. They're walking along the road with sad faces. What they had hoped for didn't come to pass. And all the while the real hope ... the hope they failed to take hold of even though he had told them again and again he would die and be raised, was walking at their side. They were feeling sorry for themselves over the loss of a false hope when the real hope, the hope which **never** disappoints, was so close they could reach out and touch him.

It was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory, and it was necessary that their false hopes should be dashed so they might fix their hearts on the real hope ... that the love of God might be poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit.

- If we have suffered disappointment,
- If life itself has been one big disappointment,
- If everything that gave meaning to our lives has been washed away in a flood of trouble, it was so that we might have our eyes opened, our hearts opened, to recognize the One who has been walking by our side, speaking to, opening to us the scriptures, and who wants to fill us with the peace of God.

"O foolish men and women, slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!"

Get your hope where it belongs. Make sure your heart is fixed on the hope which never disappoints."

If secretly I have my hope pinned on some grandiose plan or some fantasy no wonder I'm disappointed. But if I fix my hope on the Lamb himself and set about fulfilling the clear simple calling he has already given me, I'll never be disappointed.

"Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel? After all, that's where our hope is. That's why we've followed you around these three-and-a-half years...."

"It's not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses"

isn't that enough? To be my witnesses?

Don't let your hope degenerate into speculation or fantasy or vanity. Fix it on me and get on with being my witnesses as the love of God is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

And I promise you, you will never be disappointed.

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things I have prepared for those who fix their hope on me."

CHAPTER 7 - THE HOPE OF HIS RETURN

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Matthew 24:36-39

The coming of the Son of Man. What is he talking about?

It all began when the disciples pointed out the magnificent Temple buildings.

"Aren't they gorgeous, Lord!"

"Could heaven be any more beautiful than this temple?"

"You see these temple buildings?" says Jesus.

"There's not going to be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

They were shocked.

How could anything ever happen to this Temple?

How could God let anything happen to this Temple?

"When will this be? What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

The disciples understood that when this temple falls, it's got to be the beginning of the end and Jesus obliged them by teaching them about the end in Matthew 24 and 25.

Less than four decades later it happened. The Temple was destroyed by the Roman armies.

Was that the beginning of the end? Twenty centuries have passed and life still goes on.

And yet, if you read Matthew 24 - and then turn on the news, if your heart is at all sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, you discover that Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 is as relevant for this hour as when he first spoke the words.

You begin to understand that the destruction of that temple indeed marked the beginning of a time of turmoil for Jerusalem, for Israel, for the world, that continues to this day.

Babylon has long been forgotten. Rome has lost its luster. But Jerusalem is right now in the center of a global conflict. And in the center of Jerusalem's woes is that Temple Mount.

As far as Jesus was concerned, the destruction of the Temple was inevitable. It had become a temple, not to God, but to mammon.

That's why he turned over the tables of the money changers and drove out the animal merchants. God was on the sidelines. Money was on the throne in that temple.

So the Roman armies came and fulfilled Christ's prophecy and tore down the Temple. They weren't nice guys either.

They were brutal.

Many people died.

And all that death and destruction marked the end of a period of order which Jerusalem will never see again until the day it says,

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

But the destruction of the Temple was more than that.

It was a sign that all temples to mammon, all temples that ignore the One who comes in the name of the Lord are coming down sooner or later.

And each time one of these temples to mammon comes down, it's a reminder that no man, no nation, no army, no terrorist network, no financial institution, not even Satan is in control of what's happening on this earth.

God is.

Behind all the confusion is the hand of God, for those who have eyes to see.

"Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginnings of the sufferings." Matthew 24:4b-8

The sufferings don't seem so bad so long as they're somewhere else

- Afghanistan
- Africa
- the West bank
- Jerusalem.

But now our temples to mammon have been hit as a sign that our sufferings have begun. And Matthew 24 speaks directly to us preparing us for an event we say we believe every Sunday in the creed.

But do we?

Do we really expect the Lord Jesus to come back at any time? It's all so vague and far away.

Now the Bible Prophecy buffs have it down to a science. They pull out their charts and graphs and explain about the Rapture,
the Tribulation,
the Thousand Year Reign,
the Great White Throne Judgment.

But Jesus never gave us maps, or graphs, or charts. All he gave us was a warning,

"Be ready for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

***"Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and the other one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left."
(Matthew 24:40-41)***

He's not talking about the Rapture. He's talking about the angels of God gathering out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers. See Matthew 13.

"Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Watch out for the Bible Prophecy expert who tells you it can't happen yet because the Man of Sin hasn't been revealed. Whenever you see another Temple of mammon coming down, take it as a wake up call.

In our mainline churches we don't talk about these things.

We talk about God's grace. And it's true, we're living in the age of grace. During this age, anybody who wants to can turn over a new leaf and put the past behind.

Right now Jesus' blood avails for all. It will wash away any sin. Any mean, ugly, shameful thing you've done can be washed away in that blood if you bring it to him.

That blood can dissolve any chain that holds you in bondage.

Right now anybody who comes to this fountain of living water can drink new life from God.

If you want life come and get it.

But here's the point we're missing: The age of grace has a time limit. It comes to an end.

The scary thing about the return of Christ is that at his return, the age of grace is over. All accounts will be settled.

All wrongs will be righted.

All debts will be paid.

All secrets will be revealed.

That's why he says, "Be ready."

He says it again and again and again.

What's he telling me to do when he says, "Be ready"?

He's telling me to **wake up and stay focused on the things that count and clear away the clutter.**

He's telling me to live as if today is the final day.

Or as Paul puts it:

"Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Romans 13:11-14

In other words...

Make sure that the grace you receive as you eat the bread and drink the wine at the Lord's table shows up in the way you live.

Make sure that the forgiveness and peace God pours into your life as you bow in repentance before him, flows out of you as forbearance toward the people who have wronged you.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Make sure that the faith you confess in the safety of your fellowship doesn't die on your lips as you go out the door.

Make sure you're walking the walk not just thinking about it.

The events of this present hour are urging us to live by the whole gospel, not just part of it.

The whole gospel of Christ has to do with not only the past, not only with the present, but also with the future.

The same Jesus who died on the cross to drain away our guilt and rose on the third day to bring us new life...

The same Christ who floods your room right now with his Spirit is going to do exactly what he said he would do.

He's coming back.

And when he comes, nobody will wonder who he is. Everybody will know. Even the most hardened atheist. Even the most arrogant skeptic will suddenly know!

Our job is to walk with him now in such a way that wherever we happen to be at the hour of his return, on this side of death or the other,

we may be ready.

"Behold I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Revelation 22:12-13

CHAPTER 8 - CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY

Ten thousand troops had landed on the beach without a casualty. Not one enemy gun had been fired. It was reported that the enemy was holding positions in the mountains to the north. The king mounted a platform and addressed his troops,

"We go north through enemy territory. My kingdom is beyond. My palace is already preparing a banquet for our arrival. You will not see me during the battle, but I will be with you. You will survive the battle and complete the journey safely if you will remember two things:

Remember that I am with you in the heat of the battle .never forget it.

And, remember that you will see me with your own eyes in the banquet hall when you arrive at the palace."

With this the king bid his troops God's speed, left the platform and disappeared from view.

It was a perfect day. As the troops moved northward under the blessing of a blue sky they sang rousing songs. When they stopped to eat and rest the fellowship could not have been richer. How good it was to be alive!

The army reached the foothills and began climbing into the first mountain pass when suddenly all hell broke loose.

- Shells screamed overhead.
- Mortar and cannon fire tore up the earth.
- The smoke became so thick you couldn't see your hand in front of you.

Then a strange thing started happening to this army. At first it appeared to be falling apart. But no, it wasn't falling apart ... it was beginning to divide. Large numbers were turning back and running toward the sea. Others were waving white flags and surrendering to the enemy.

But, in the midst of the disintegration a small spearhead of troops was forming and moving forward up through the mountain pass. All the shelling and strafing couldn't seem to stop it.

Wave after wave of enemy fire poured down upon them. The spearhead moved on.

Some days later what was once an army of ten thousand, now reduced to 500 troops, entered the gates of the city and poured into the palace with shouts of victory. As they were seating themselves at the most glorious banquet table they had ever seen, a servant of the king asked one of the troops how they made it.

"Simple," answered the soldier. "We fixed our minds on two things:

That the king was with us whether we could see him or not.

And that one day we would be sitting at this table looking into that face."

The soldier pointed to the king who had just entered the room amid shouts of joy.

the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:26-27

the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints what mystery?

The mystery that God the Son can dwell within a human being.

The saints who survive the battles, the monotony, the chaos of this world, re those who understand this mystery and who live in it.

1. That Christ is in us ... literally living within.
2. That Christ's presence within sustains the hope of glory which keeps us going.

...the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

It's a mystery because it is not fully comprehensible to the human mind ... that Christ Jesus is both seated at the right hand of the Throne of God, at the headquarters of the universe, and also dwelling in the very bodies of those who have opened their hearts to him and are doing his word he dwells in us.

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

"I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you

will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." John 14:18-20

...because I live, you will live also.....

not only over there on the other side of death but here in this realm of flesh and blood.

"This is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life ... he who has not the Son of God has not life."

To have the Son is to have him living within.

- Speaking within our very hearts his words which are spirit and life.
- Filling us with a consciousness of the presence of God.
- Flooding us with a continuous foretaste of the glory toward which we move.
- Giving us power to do the will of God.

When Paul talks about suffering the loss of all things that he might gain Christ...that he might know him in the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death ... where else does this fellowship with Christ take place but within?

....it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me....

Christ in you the hope of glory.

What a difference it makes in our living when we practice the presence of Christ within, when we hold fellowship with him walk with him talk with him.

- How can we withhold mercy from those around us.
- How can we do shoddy work,
live in lust,
sink into whole days of self-pity,

when we're communing with the Son of the living God within our very hearts?

The power to live in mercy,
to pour out our lives for others,
to forgive,

to make restitution when we have wronged someone,
to admit the truth when we have sinned,
to keep our commitments,
to remain faithful, even unto death,

the power to do these things comes from having a living relationship with the indwelling Christ.

But what if, with the passing of time, the Christ who came to dwell within us at our rebirth becomes neglected? Like inviting the king to come and dwell in your home and then after a while taking him for granted ... leaving him to shift for himself ... while you give attention to other things.

Many of us have done just that. We have lost touch with the indwelling Christ.

- We may be into religion.
- We may be experts on Bible prophecy, teaching everybody else how to pray.

We may consider ourselves discerning critics of the state of the church, but our own personal relationship with the Christ who dwells within has dried up.

So what happens when we lose touch with the indwelling Christ? When we lose touch with the indwelling Christ we always lose our hope....

Christ in you the hope of glory....

The vision of glory that drives us on through the battlefield is kept alive by the indwelling Christ. When we lose touch with him our vision goes blank. And when our vision goes blank ... when we lose our hope of glory...

- we lose our way,
- we turn back and head for the sea,
- we surrender to the enemy.

The battlefield is strewn with the mangled bodies of saints who lost their hope and gave up. And they lost their hope because they lost touch with the indwelling Christ.

For this reason, during the days when Jesus was with the disciples in flesh and blood, he was preparing them for the time when he would not only be with them.... but in them.

"I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." John 14:18-20

"I in you,".... he speaks to us no longer from without, but from within.

To commune with Jesus within is to let those words which he speaks within ... words which are identical to the words of scripture, but now understandable,

alive,

blazing,

clear,

pure,

to let those words become our life ... to live them.

When Paul says to Timothy,

....rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and a sound mind..." II Timothy 1:6-7

he is calling him to renew his communion with the indwelling Christ.

Consider the meal which Jesus instituted. After Jesus gave thanks for the bread he gave it to the disciples,

"Take eat, this is my body given for you."

After Jesus gave thanks for the wine he passed it to the disciples,

"Take and drink, this is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The eating and the drinking are a receiving, a reminder that Christ keeps giving himself to us, keeps dwelling within.

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last

day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." John 6:52-56

Christ in you the hope of glory....

He is the hope of glory when we are in relationship with him.... listening to him, doing his word. Jesus takes care of his side of the relationship. He promises to come to us ... and he comes ... he comes afresh today.

But what about our side of the relationship? Are we really in touch with the Lord God the Son who died, who rose, who now dwells within just as surely as he reigns at the right hand of the Father?

God help us today and in the coming days to know and to dwell in the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now made manifest to his saints,

to know the riches of the glory of this mystery which is,

Christ in you, the hope of glory.