

OVERFLOWING WITH HOPE

A message for Darlington Christian Fellowship, Sunday 26 April 2020

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Good morning. It's a joy to be with you this morning, even though I can't see your smiling faces and gauge your response to this message. I'm reminded of a story about the Pastor of a local church, in those times when congregations could meet normally in a church building and greet each other with a hug or a handshake. It was the Pastor's custom after the service to stand at the door and shake hands with the flock as they filed out through the front doors.

One Sunday a older gentleman shook the Pastor's hand and said, "Pastor, your sermon today reminded me of the peace and love of God". The Pastor was quite taken aback as no one had said such a thing to him before. "Thank you", said the Pastor, "Tell me, why did my sermon remind you of the peace and love of God?". Well, replied the man, "Your sermon reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all understanding. And it reminded me of the love of God because it went on forever!"

I hope this message today doesn't have the same effect for you!

In these difficult times of uncertainty, it's good to remind ourselves of the sure and certain hope we have in Christ. I've entitled this message today "Overflowing With Hope!"

Firstly, I'd like to read a couple of verses from Romans chapter 15. The whole chapter is really encouraging, but let's just read verses 4 & 5 and then verse 13.

*"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have **hope**. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

*Verse 13 – "May the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may **overflow with hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

And then a few verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Verses 11-23)

*"...Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order **that you may know the hope to which he has called you**, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him*

to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Well, I hope your day is going well. I hope you're coping OK with the restrictions imposed on us all due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I hope you're in good health and staying safe. No doubt we're all hoping this crisis will soon be over and we'll be able to return to some degree of normality.

Many people are living in hope of retaining their current employment, or of obtaining another job in the near future. Maybe you are even daring to hope for a pay-rise this year. Or maybe someone is thinking "I hope I meet my future husband or future wife this year.

What is hope? How would you define it?

We often use the word "hope" when we are speaking of circumstances that are mostly beyond our control. People often cross their fingers as they talk about what they hope might happen – as if that could make any difference! And so we've come to equate hope with uncertainty, with luck or chance. And we often, fatalistically, resign ourselves to not expect too much.

However, the Bible uses the word "hope" somewhat differently. It talks about a hope that is sure and steadfast. Hebrews 6:19 (NRSV) tells us, "***We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered***". Because of what Jesus has done for us, it's a hope that is certain and a future that is assured.

The Apostle Paul knew that certain hope. That's why he could write to the church in Rome (Romans 15:13 NIV) "*May the God of hope, fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may **overflow with hope**, by the power of the Holy Spirit.*"

How can such a state be possible when we live in such a broken world that is constantly being threatened by terrorism, by shocking acts of violence and bigotry. There are so many wars going on around the world even as we sit here listening to this message. Even nature invokes it frustration with natural disasters and we've seen such terrible tragedies recently right here in Australia, not the least of which is the shocking bushfires. And hot on the heels of that, we are faced with this global pandemic that has seen over 2 million people infected and over 130,000 deaths.

The pandemic has triggered the worst global financial crisis in decades. We live in a world that sometimes seems as if it has no hope of a peaceful future.

How is it possible for us as believers, whose brothers and sisters in many parts of the world are under constant persecution, to have even a small glimmer of hope, let alone be overflowing with it? Well, Jesus never promised that living for him in this world would be easy. In fact, he told his followers, "*In the world you will have tribulation!*". But he didn't leave it there! He followed it up by saying, "*But cheer up! I have overcome the world.*". (John 16:33). And that, friends, is the number one basis for our hope.

Earlier this month, over what we call the Easter weekend, we remembered the cruel death of Jesus on the cross and celebrated his glorious resurrection! And we do the same whenever we partake of communion together. On that day when Jesus was handed over to

the Roman soldiers and he was beaten, bruised and nailed to a tree, becoming a human spectacle for his enemies to mock and deride, it seemed as if there was no hope. Even his closest disciples forsook him and fled. From a distance they watched as he finally expired, and his body was taken down from the cross and laid in a borrowed tomb.

Hope seemed to vanish. Hope of Jesus being the long-awaited Messiah who would usher in a new kingdom and overthrow the occupying Roman army. Hope of Israel again becoming the great nation that God had promised the patriarch Abraham that they would be. Hope seemed like a mere illusion. Dreams were shattered, hearts were crushed. The hopeful became hopeless. It seemed their luck had run out.

But then came Sunday morning! By the power of God, the huge stone sealing the entrance to the tomb was rolled away. The same Jesus, whose broken, bleeding body had been wrapped in bandages and placed in the cold dark tomb, was now absent from the tomb and angels guarded the entrance. When the faithful women followers of Jesus came to anoint his body, the angels said, *"Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, he is risen!"* (Like 24:5-6). Hallelujah! Hope is alive again. All is not lost.

One of the most moving experiences of my life has been to enter the Garden tomb on the edge of the old City of Jerusalem. Kathryn and I did it about 12 years ago and I was able to visit there again in 2018. There is some controversy over whether the garden tomb is actually the place where Jesus' body was laid and from which he arose, or whether it is, in fact another site that has a church building built on top of it and 4 different Christian denominations claim a share of.

For me, the garden tomb, which is close to the area known as Gordon's Golgotha and set in beautiful gardens, is much more likely to have been the authentic tomb of Jesus. But, at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter because both tombs are empty! Jesus' mortal remains are not there! He rose from the dead after three days, giving all who place their trust in him the hope of eternal life. And he was seen alive by hundreds of witnesses over a period of forty days before he ascended to heaven.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:11, *"If the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead, lives in you, he shall also quicken your mortal body, by his Spirit who lives in you."* The resurrection of Jesus gives us all hope of that great resurrection when, as Paul tells us in his letter to the Thessalonians (chapter 4 and verse 16), *"The dead in Christ shall rise first and then those who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the air - and so shall we ever be with the Lord!"*

Webster's Dictionary defines "hope" as *"to want something to happen or be true and think that it could happen or be true."* Another dictionary says that hope is *"a feeling of optimism or a desire that something will happen."* And that's exactly what we're expressing when we say we hope it will be sunny today. Or we hope the Australian cricket team will win the ashes, or that the Eagles or the Dockers will win the premiership. (Right now, of course, thousands of Aussies are hoping that sporting events will start to fire up again within the next few months). It's the kind of hope that we may hang on to if we are looking for our life's partner, or wanting to get a good job that pays enough to cover our bills and put food on the table, or even buy a new car or pay for a holiday.

Optimism and hope are certainly great alternatives to pessimism or negativity. They are much better than resigning ourselves to the worst scenario happening – or worse still, living in fear of the unknown. We need to keep hope alive – and there is proven value in positive thinking. But the hope that Jesus gives us is far superior to positive thinking. It's a sure and certain hope. The dictionary definition of hope is not the same as the biblical concept of hope that we're looking at today. The word "hope" appears many times in both the Old & New Testaments.

In Psalm 33 verse 22 the Psalmist prays, *"May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we **put our hope in you.**"* The Hebrew word in this verse is *"yachal"*. It's rendered as hope, not in a sense of being uncertain of the outcome, but more of a waiting for something to happen as you work towards its fulfilment.

This word can also be found in Psalm 130 verse 7: *"O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption."* That is a far more certain hope than just hoping (fingers crossed!) that it will all turn out alright in the end. *Yachal* focuses more on the certainty of God's unfailing love and his full and complete redemption of our body, soul and spirit.

It's like an architect who designs a building. His knowledge and experience tell him that if the builder follows the plans meticulously, the building will turn out just as the architect intended it. A good architect doesn't just throw together a house plan and hope (in the dictionary sense) that the plan will work! That's a recipe for disaster!

The architect starts out with a vision of what the building can look like and how it can be functional. He then spends many hours committing the vision to intricate drawings and specifications that will meet all the safety and building regulations and at the same time be aesthetically pleasing. The plans have to be submitted to Council and various Government departments for approval, all of which require a period of waiting. Then the architect must wait for the foundations to go down and the building to be erected and finished to a high standard. The outcome of *yachal* is assured, but the architect (and the owner who commissioned the architect) must wait to see the desired result – the finished building.

Jesus told his followers that he was going to prepare a place for them, and when it was finished, he'd come back to collect them and take them to the place he'd prepared. It's a sure and certain hope, not just wishful thinking. We may not yet know where heaven actually is, how big it is or what it looks like, (except for some glimpses in the book of Revelation) - but we can be assured that it is where Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. Our hope of eternal life is sure and certain.

In a traditional Christian funeral service, the Pastor or Priest will often say something along the lines of "We commit the body of this loved one to the ground in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life". As believers, the historically proven fact of Jesus' resurrection, testified to by hundreds of eyewitnesses, gives us the assurance of our own

resurrection to eternal life. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians (15:42) *“The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. And in John 14 verse 19 we hear Jesus say, “Because I live, you will live also.”*

Back to the Hebrew word “yachal”, it can also be interpreted as “trust”. It’s the word used in Isaiah 51 verse 5. *“My righteousness draws near speedily; my salvation is on the way. The islands will look to me and wait in **hope** for my arm.”* When we look to God in hope, we are putting our trust in him and his power to act on our behalf. So Psalm 130 verse 7 could also read: *“Let Israel **trust** in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.”*

Then there’s the Hebrew word, “towcheleth”. It has the same root as “yachal” - but more specifically means “expectation”. Our cat sits in front of the fridge each morning with towcheleth — expectation! She expects that Kathryn or I will open a packet of cat food and put it on a plate for her to satisfy her hunger. Of course, we’re human and occasionally we don’t live up to her expectations.

In Psalm 39, verse 7 the psalmist says *“And now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.”* (My towcheleth, my expectation is in you). My cat lives in expectation because she’s proved repeatedly my faithfulness to her. When our children were little (and not so little) they had that same sense of expectation. They expected we would feed and clothe them and keep them in a safe environment. These and many, many more verses illustrate the Psalmist’s reliance upon the trustworthiness of the Lord. The Lord CAN be trusted. He WILL keep His promises We CAN place our hope in him.

In the New Testament we see the word “Hope” in several verses. This word “Hope” is an absolute, a guarantee without a doubt. It is the Greek word “elpis”(or “elpizo”). Strong’s Concordance tells us this word can be translated as “hope, expectation, trust and confidence”. It can also mean “to expect or anticipate with pleasure.” Again, Strong’s says it’s an “expectation of what is sure”.

The word “elpis” is used in Romans 5, verses 1 & 2 - *“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice **in the hope of the glory of God.**”*

We rejoice in the glory of God, not with uncertainty but with joyful anticipation, with expectation, with assurance that God keeps his promises. The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in the church at Colossae (Colossians 1:3-5) *“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ‘because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people— the faith and love that spring from the **hope** stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.”*

The Hope of Heaven is not a maybe — but an absolute and definite guarantee from God's Word. Paul wrote to Titus (Titus 1:2): *"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the **hope** of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time."* Eternal life, for the one who puts their faith and hope in Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death on their behalf, is promised and guaranteed by the God of the Universe. He cannot lie. We can put our hope, our trust, our confidence in him.

Again, Paul says to Titus (Titus 2:13) that as believers we are waiting *"for that **blessed hope** - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."* Every believer in Jesus Christ may look with confidence to the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour. We cannot know the timing of this, but we can be assured of its certainty. Again, to Titus, Paul says (Titus 3: 5—7) *"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the **hope of eternal life.**"*

We are justified by God's grace. That's guaranteed and so is the eternal life that he offers us instead of our broken, sinful life that was leading to eternal punishment. By the grace of God, you and I can have that **hope** or guarantee personally. And this grace is available to the whole world (John 3:16). It is not determined by how good we are — or how hard we try — not by good works, but by Grace alone, which means "undeserved mercy." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So how can we KNOW that Hope is real?

The Apostle John wrote in his first epistle (1 John 5:13) *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life."* We can KNOW, not just in the dictionary sense of the word hope, but in the biblical sense of surety and trust in the One who made the promise. God promises that when this mortal body expires, the eternal life, that he's already placed in us when we were born again into the Kingdom of God, will be what we continue to experience.

John didn't say "I'm writing to let you know that this eternal life is something that you will receive when you die physically but he says *"I'm writing to let you know that you **HAVE** eternal life"*. It's present tense. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead already lives in us and gives us this eternal life. And it's not something that just started when we accepted Christ. We receive the eternal life that has always existed in the great Creator.

It's a bit like getting on-board a train that simply stopped at your station to pick up passengers but actually started its journey hundreds of kilometres further back down the line. You are simply getting on-board and joining the passengers that are already on the train. When you receive eternal life, you're getting onboard and joining millions of believers who are already on board and heading towards their eternal destiny of life in the place Jesus has prepared for us all. And the destination is guaranteed!

It's this blessed hope that has kept millions of Christian martyrs' firm in their faith as they went to the gallows, were burned at the stake, trampled by elephants, thrown to the lions or faced the firing squad.

It's the same blessed **hope** for which eleven of the original twelve disciples gave their lives and which sustained the apostle Paul throughout all of his persecution, imprisonment and final physical death. The **sure and certain hope** of eternal life is what each of us can focus on when life hands us a lemon and we're tempted to doubt or give up.

But friends, our eternal life has already started. As part of this eternal life we have a whole lot of things that God has promised us. When Paul talks about overflowing with hope, there is so much more, not just a basic shell.

That's why he says in Ephesians 1 verses 18 &19, *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the **hope** to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe"*. God doesn't want his people living in ignorance of this hope. He wants us to be aware, every day of our lives, on good days and bad days, that his eternal life is ours — both in the here and now and long after this mortal body has expired. And we can live in that sure and certain hope.

So much of life here on earth is uncertain. But God's Word assures us over and over again that there is a certainty of eternal life for those put their hope in him.

And Paul says in that passage from Romans 5 (verses 2—5):

*"And we boast in the **hope** of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 'perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. And **hope does not put us to shame**, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

So, if we do suffer for our faith, if we do encounter persecution, it sets off a chain reaction: suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character and as our character is built, so too is our hope. Not that finger-crossing, teeth-gritting kind of hope — but "elpis" - that sure and certain hope that's founded on God's Word throughout the Scriptures and in the reassuring words of Jesus himself.

The worldly kind of hope can leave us disappointed and ashamed when things don't go as we hoped, but the God kind of hope, Paul declares, *"does not put us to shame"*. That's because *"God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit."* So, as we bring this message to a close, I want to just remind you of where this hope comes from. Romans 15 verse 4 gives us part of the answer: *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and comfort of the Scriptures we might have **hope**."*

As we read the Scriptures and immerse ourselves in God 's Word, the Holy Spirit brings that Word alive and produces that eternal hope within us. And it's the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that is our guarantee of this blessed hope.

The Apostle Peter tells us (1 Peter 1:3):

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”*

Friends, no matter what life may throw at us, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and that as we put our trust in his written word and in the Living Word himself we will have an assurance of this hope that nothing can take away from us. It’s the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that is our guarantee of this blessed hope.

And as we overflow with hope, it will be contagious! Don’t spread the Coronavirus! Spread the Hope virus!

God bless you!