



Advent 2011

Some thoughts on...Hope

Picture with me for a moment – the skies are darkened with ominous thunder clouds, when suddenly a shaft of sunlight breaks through the gathering storm and brightens the landscape. Hope is like that ray of sunshine that penetrates the layers of darkness that threaten to envelop our lives. Hope lifts our spirits and gives us the strength to carry on during difficult times, believing that things will turn out okay in the end, better days are ahead, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. But like the sunlight, hope cannot exist in a vacuum. It must have a source.

Hope that comes from within is really nothing more than wishful thinking. Such hope is okay when times are good, but much too shallow to support people when their circumstances take a turn for the worse, i.e. in times of sickness, personal tragedy, financial ruin, etc. It is easy to see how people's hearts can be overwhelmed if their only hope comes from wishing things would get better!

Thankfully, Christians are not left to muster up hope on our own. Rather, Scriptures teach us to look to God as the source of our hope – “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.” (Romans 15:13)

Hope starts with God, with His love and His power. We find hope in God's love – love that gave His Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. How great is His love that He offers forgiveness and the promise of eternal life to everyone who will repent and put their trust in Jesus. We find

hope in God's power as displayed in Creation. We also find it in His power over death. Christ's resurrection is proof that God has defeated sin and evil in our hearts and in this world. Satan and his forces of evil will not win out in the end.

As followers of Christ, our hope is not built on our own wishful thinking, but rather on God's character and His deeds. We have hope because God is Sovereign and faithful to His promises. Hope becomes real in our lives as we put our trust in Christ and allow His Spirit to produce the fruit of joy and peace in our hearts. These are antidotes for the doom and gloom that pervade our world and the discouragement and despair that can grip our hearts in the face of sickness, loss, fear, etc. No matter what the circumstances, we can have hope because we know that God is with us and we trust Him to work things out as He sees best. As we trust in God, He fills our hearts with hope not just to meet our needs, but to overflow to those around us!

Listening to the news quickly illustrates that hope is in short supply these days! The world is reeling from wars, natural disasters, crime and violence, terrorism, economic turmoil, etc. It's understandable that people are fearful of what the future may hold. Even though we live in relative peace and security here in Canada, many still struggle with depression, fear and anxiety for a multitude of reasons. Of course, there are often medical conditions that need treatment, but we should not neglect the spiritual side of things too. God offers us hope as a treatment for our souls, or as the writer of Hebrews calls it, "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19). When our hearts are filled with hope, our bodies often benefit as well.

As we near the end of another year, I offer up this prayer as a benediction:

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." 2 Thess 2:16-17