

Introduction:

Today's message is the second instalment of a mini-series entitled "God knows". This week's subject is "Hope".



To summarise briefly for those who were not here last Sunday - the point of these three messages is to remind us that God knows everything, including the end of everything - and that we can therefore trust Him completely with our lives.

- God's plan is perfect - whenever we diverge from His perfect will for our lives, we miss His best for us.
- He will make every situation count in His quest to perfect us for His glory. Does this mean that the bad or difficult things that occur in our lives are caused by Him? Mostly not, they are normally a result of bad choices or someone's sin - either our own or someone else's.
- Does the Lord have the right to shape and perfect us? Of course He does - that which has been created is always subject to its Creator! Last week we illustrated this by speaking about baking a cake.

Last Sunday we spoke about "What's in a name?" where we saw that the Lord named people in a way that demonstrates that He does know everything - including things that are going to happen before they ever happen. The names that He gave also revealed something of His will for the recipient of the name.

Now, let us turn to this week's subject: "Hope"

As mentioned last week, many people (especially at this time of year) have asked one or all of these questions: "Who am I?" "What is my purpose?" "Why am I here?" "What will happen to me when I die?" These are all valid questions, but can only be answered when we ask them of our Creator. Often these questions are motivated by the fact that we wonder what life is all about - so much of what we do and suffer seems so pointless at the time. This is why we need an eternal perspective! Why we need HOPE! See how this Scripture describes it...



Ephesians 2:12 (NLT)

²In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

I often remember how pointless life was and seemed to me to be before I met the Lord. Because I did not understand eternity, or know my Creator, there was no real point to my life. This is why so many people who have not yet entered into relationship with the Lord through Jesus Christ (the anointed One, the Lord Who saves - remember?) fill their lives with the pursuit of wealth, or recognition. However, a moment's thought will show that neither of these things have any eternal value - our physical bodies truly do return to dust once we die, and we'll have no use for material things once we have died.

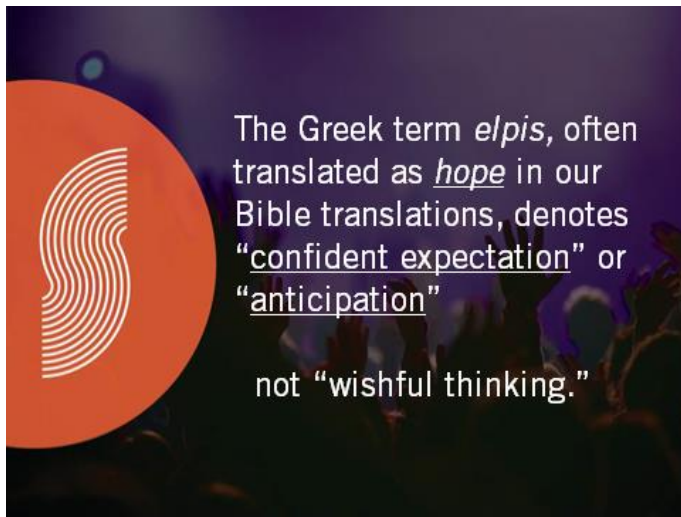
So what is different in the life of the Christian believer? It is the fact that we place our HOPE in spending eternity with the Lord - Who knows.

Now, I want to make sure that we more fully understand what the word HOPE really means when it is used in Scripture. I have taken some of the following remarks from the *Holman treasury of key Bible words*:

Today the word "hope" usually means nothing more than wishful thinking. We often hear people say, "I hope that I pass the exam," "I hope that the Stormers win," or "I hope that it rains today." In each of these statements, hope is nothing more than a wish for something good to happen.

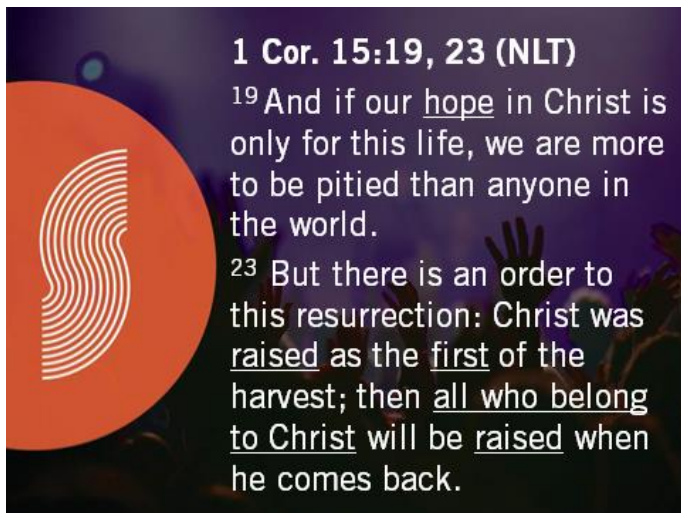
Of course, we all need to have hope - it keeps us going. Present hurts and uncertainty over what the future holds create the constant need for hope. Poverty, hunger, disease, terrorism, and destruction create a longing for something better. Historically, people have looked to the future with a mixture of longing and fear. Many have concluded that there is no reasonable basis for hope - therefore, they believe, "to hope" is to live with an illusion. This viewpoint is partially correct; Scripture tells us that those who do not have God in their lives do not have hope - as we saw with Ephesians 2:12 which is still on the screen.

Now let's see how the word hope is defined in Scripture, so that we correctly understand the Scriptures that use the word:




The word hope, therefore, properly means that we have an expectation or belief in the fulfillment of an anticipated future event. Biblical hope is hope in what God will do in the future. And He **DOES** know the future!

At the heart of Christian hope is the resurrection of Jesus. Paul discusses the nature, certainty, and importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-28. Paul is certain that Christian hope points to the future. We'll read only two verses (19 and 23) of this portion, but I would recommend that you read the rest at home for a fuller picture.



The significance of Christ's resurrection is not only that it points to His victory over death, but it also extends that victory to those who are His - that is, we who are His disciples! Now that seems to me to be a really good truth in which to place my hope!

Let's look at another Scripture that says the same thing - written by our friend Peter, whose life we looked at very briefly last week:



1 Peter 1:3 (NLT)

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation,



1 Peter 1:4-5 (NLT)


⁴ and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. ⁵ And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

To demonstrate what was said about the translation and meaning of the word "*elpis*", let's read the NIV too - and because this is such an encouraging promise for us, I just want to read it again!



1 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV84)

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, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,



1 Peter 1:5 (NIV84)

⁵ 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.

In this passage, Peter attributes living hope to the resurrection of Christ and points to God's future blessing upon we who belong to Christ. This hope in the promise for the future empowers us to live without despair through the struggle and suffering of the present age - which, as I always remind us, is a VERY short time in eternity!

And now to REALLY drive the point home that we have valid reason for our hope, let's read Romans 8:24-25:

Romans 8:24-25 (NLT)

²⁴ We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope* for it. ²⁵ But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

*Some manuscripts read wait.

It may be seen from this that our hope is not a passive thing - we need to wait patiently and confidently - in other words, we agree with the truth in which we hope.

With all of this in mind, it may be seen that many people do hope - but often their hope is misplaced. An example might be that of the political transition of South Africa in 1994. Many people put their hope in Nelson Mandela - but he is dead now, and the positive part of his legacy has not endured for even 20 years. (As an aside, who gives credit to the Lord for answering the prayers of His faithful intercessors who prayed during that time?)

So we see that hope that is not placed in a truth is not really hope at all. God knows, no-one else does.

Now, how does hope affect the way that we live? Let's look at Jesus - Jesus knew the joy that awaited Him while He lived on the earth - what was that joy? The fact that He knew His destiny, and that the intense suffering that He endured would come to an end, and culminate in His, and His Father's, glory! So His focus (or hope) was what He knew to be His destiny - He therefore knew that although His suffering was horrendous, it would come to an end. His hope was in His Father, Who knows!

The writer to the Hebrews has this to say - the previous few verses refer to people we often call "the heroes of faith". I have chosen The Message version, because it puts it so well...

Hebrews 12:1-3 (Message)

Do you see what this means - all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running - and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (Message)

Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God.

Hebrews 12:1-3 (Message)

When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

We may conclude, therefore, that our hope will be fulfilled where we align ourselves with its realisation or fulfilment - we need to live as though we believe the truth in which we hope.

Simple examples might be ones that we used earlier "I hope that I pass the exam". The actions that will result in one passing the exam would be to apply oneself to study. "I hope that the Stormers win" would require that the Stormers train diligently, and know their opposing side well. "I hope that it rains today" would require that we pray to the Lord and ask Him to send rain ☺.

God knows...

Practically speaking then, how do we hope in a Biblically accurate way?

- We need to be in relationship with Christ (be His disciple),
- We need to know what God's promises are (read Scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit),
- We need to live in a way that demonstrates that we believe what the Lord has said.

Again, as I said last week, each of us needs to understand that we are not a mistake, that we have been created by God for this time and place, and that we do have a purpose here on the earth - but even more so, that we have an eternal purpose and destiny. God knows.

Trust Him to lead and guide you as you fix your hope in His will - He always knows best!

Video clip

Communion elements and worship team

Pray for the congregation - particularly for a revelation of the hope that Jesus Christ holds before us, and that our best response is one of love for Him, trust in Him, and obedience to Him.
