



BelPres Church

Hope Bigger Than My Hopelessness

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Go ahead and have a seat. Yeah, you can give God a hand. That's always appropriate. Good to see all of you. Happy three-day weekend. Happy midwinter break and all of that stuff. I'm glad you're here. Those of you watching online, thank you for joining us, maybe from where you're on vacation or something like that. So thanks for all being here.

Last Sunday, I was talking with a family, and they said that they hope the Seahawks would win the Super Bowl to kind of make up for the Mariners not going to the World Series. And so I said, no, actually, it's better this way because the Seahawks are going to win the Super Bowl, which they did, and the Mariners will win the World Series all in the same year. Yeah. And then their daughter said, yeah, and the Storm and the Sounders and heck, let's just throw in the Kraken as well. And 2026 would be known as the year of the Seattle sweep. Be awesome. And the Sounders will come back. So let me ask you—sorry, Sonics, Sonics will come back. That's what I meant. Thank you, Sonics.

Let me ask you this question. So am I being hopeful, or does that cross the line into wishful thinking? Because there's a difference. There's a difference between sturdy biblical hope and wishful thinking. And one of the many ways that Jesus' good news in our lives is he gives us hope bigger than our hopelessness. And there's just a ton of hopelessness right now, isn't there? There's just the daily news that bombards us with everything that is wrong everywhere in the world all the time. And then there's the personal pain that we have—health problems, broken relationships, school or career problems, financial fears, death of a child, death of a spouse, on and on.

And some of you are in a situation like that right now, and those things are real, and they hurt, and Jesus doesn't ask us to pretend that they don't hurt. He never asks us to pretend that everything is okay when it isn't. And we need space for grief. And Jesus meets us in that grief and gives us hope bigger than all of our hopelessness. Not wishful thinking, or just denial of reality, but a solid biblical hope.

Pastor Tim Keller says that biblical hope is a life-shaping certainty of something that hasn't happened yet, but you know it will. Hope shapes our lives, shapes how we behave, how we live. If it's like an army that's losing a battle, and if it hears that reinforcements are coming, even if the reinforcements are a long way away, that army starts to fight harder and endure longer because there's hope.

The Puritan pastor Jonathan Edwards said, hope is the truth that your bad things will be turned for good, your good things can never be lost, and your best things are still to come.

So if you have a Bible, turn to Romans chapter 4, or you can follow along on the screen. And in Romans 4, Paul is talking about Abraham, and how Abraham, even though he was old, believed God's promises that he and his wife Sarah were going to have a son. So that's the context.

Picking it up in verse 18, he says, Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed, and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, so shall your offspring be. Without weakening his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead. I think it's a very brutal way to put that. I think that could have been said more diplomatically. Body was as good as dead since he was about 100 years old, and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Look at the phrase, he faced the fact. He did not engage in wishful thinking. He did not pretend everything was okay when it wasn't. He faced the fact, yet, verse 20, yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God.

Promise—that word promise—is what hope all hinges on. It shows up five times in just seven verses. What did Abraham hope in? His circumstances? Uh-uh. He hoped in the promises that God had made. Biblical hope is not what we hope for, it's what we hope in, who we hope in.

When we hope for something—a certain marriage or a job outcome or something or certain school, certain career, all of that—we are open to disappointment because those things may not happen or they may not last.

But hoping in Jesus and his promises is a sturdy hope. It's not what we hope for, it's who we hope in. And Jesus gives us a lot of promises.

In fact, here's a few of them. And no, you're not supposed to read that. No, don't go grabbing for your glasses. I did this on purpose to kind of make a point. God gives us a lot of promises throughout the Bible, and that's just a few of them. There's a lot more. There's way more than just that. That's just a few of them.

But you know what? There is one promise that is not on this slide, and there is one promise that is nowhere in the Bible. God never promised to give us an easy life. Jesus didn't have an easy life, why should we? The disciples were all martyred for their faith. He never promises us an easy life, but he does give us many other promises that bring hope.

So let's keep reading, verse 21. He gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. There is the word promise again. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. The words it was credited to him were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

So here is one of God's promises. Promises are sure. You can rely on them. They will happen. Hope is not flimsy wishful thinking. Our hope is built on the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. And there are a lot of good empirical reasons to believe he really was raised from the dead in history, as a matter of history. And we've got a document on our website, in the What We Believe section, that lists some of the reasons that we can believe Jesus really was raised from the dead, right?

And all our hopes are grounded on that one fact—that God can do what he promises to do. So because he lives, we have hope. Now, that raises a question. Okay, well, if he can do anything, even raise someone from the dead, then why doesn't he just fix my situation? Why doesn't he just make it better? Why doesn't he just fix my circumstances, if he can do anything?

And that's a great question, and there's a couple of answers to that. First, I have no idea. Like, I'm just the preacher here. I don't know, right? God is so much bigger than we are. He thinks differently than we do. He zigs when we zag. I don't know. There's some mystery here, right? But there are lots of mysteries in life. Like, how big is the universe? That's a mystery. Or why don't the Backstreet Boys want to hear you say, I like it that way? Tell me why. That's a reference to

a song. You may be too old or too young for that reference. Don't worry. It's just a song you never need to hear. But the Gen X people in the room, you are with me, right? There's just mystery.

But it's not all mystery. One of the reasons we suffer is because God gave us free will, because if not, we don't have free will. We're just robots, and robots can't love. And in our free will, we hurt each other. That's a lot of where suffering comes from. And then also, God is the source of all life. And when we rebelled, we separated ourselves from him, the source of life. So now our bodies don't work right. We get old, we get sick, we die. There's reasons why we suffer.

But Jesus' resurrection means that because he lives, his promises are sure. And that gives us hope. Unlike everything else that promises so much and often delivers so little—education, career, relationships, money—God's promises are sure.

Let's keep reading. Chapter 5. Remember, in the original manuscripts there were no verses, there were no chapters. It was just all one continuous narrative. Chapter 5: Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, there's another promise. Our sins are forgiven because Jesus paid the price for them on the cross. 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.

So here's another promise God gives us. We have access to him through his Holy Spirit that lives inside of us. And he wants to hear from you, and he wants to hear from me. He's interested in you. You can barge into his office, so to speak, anytime day or night, and he will stop what he's doing and pay attention to you. The God of the universe takes particular interest in you. That gives us hope. He's with us, for us.

Verse 3: Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings. Other translations say we rejoice in our sufferings. Wow, that's amazing. Because we know that suffering produces—that's an important phrase, super important phrase—suffering produces something. What does suffering produce? Perseverance, and then perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame. We won't be embarrassed if we hope. We won't be disappointed if we hope.

So here's another promise. Suffering produces good things. Yes, it happens, but God always uses it for good things. It's not one painful thing after the other, and then you die. With Jesus, it's always productive. It's not hamster wheel

suffering. We just go around and around and around and around, and you don't get anywhere. It's productive. It produces good things.

And from my own experience, the one thing that I know that I know that I know that I know about the God who comes to us in Jesus is he brings good things out of bad things. And this is a profoundly Christian point. You kind of don't find it in any other religion because it's grounded in the cross, where Jesus took the tragedy, the horror of his crucifixion, and used it to pay the price for our sins and rise again. This is central to the Christian faith.

So when we're in hard times, we can say, I don't know how this hard time is going to end. I just know God's going to use it for good. See, without Jesus, suffering is just meaningless and pointless, and it can make you angry and bitter and all of that. But with Jesus, suffering isn't meaningless. It builds perseverance, which is the ability to be strong in any circumstance, to endure anything, and that makes us indestructible, unconquerable. Nothing can defeat you when you have perseverance.

Perseverance produces character. Our circumstances are temporary. Character is eternal. And I know it can kind of sound like a consolation prize, right? Like, well, you can't have what you want, but at least you have character. I'd rather have what I want. Thank you very much. My character is just fine the way it is. Sort of like when I was in high school and girls would say, Oh, Scott, he's so nice. That means they weren't going to date me, right? So, you know, that was just the consolation prize.

Character is not a consolation prize. It means we're brave in the face of fear, joyful in the midst of pain.

Our love is so powerful, it heals injustice, and it mends relationships. If you want to be strong, you have to lift heavy things. If you want to be strong, you have to lift heavy things. And God uses suffering to help us get strong, to have strong character. And that lasts forever.

My hope is not in my circumstances turning out a certain way. My hope is in the promise that he will make sure any hard thing I go through will produce good things. So, those are a few of the promises that God makes us in the Bible. Let me add, out of this passage, two more from the rest of the Bible.

Fourth, another promise Jesus makes is, in hard times, I'm with you in it. If a suffering and crucified Savior means anything at all, it means that he understands what pain feels like, what suffering is like, which means he can

meet me in my pain, my fears, because he's gone through them. He gets it, and again, I know, to say, well, in hard times, Jesus' presence is there, and you experience his presence, and it's real, and that brings courage and joy. I get it. It sounds like a consolation prize.

You know who never says that? You know who never says it's a consolation prize? People in the most painful circumstances who experience the presence of Jesus in a very real way. They never say it's a consolation prize. They say that's the grand prize. They say it's everything.

And then one last promise that I'll mention. Our hope comes from God's promise to end suffering. And not just someday in heaven when we die, though that is also true. And in western culture, we've lost sight of how significant that promise is, because in spite of all of our problems right now, let's be honest, life is pretty good here, right? If you're in a western country, life is pretty good here. And so we tend to focus all of our hopes here.

But there's something so much better coming, trillions of years where we get to be with each other and with Jesus, not on some ethereal heaven with clouds and stupid stuff like that. No, no, on this earth, completely renewed to be everything God intended to be without suffering, pain, or death. And when we are there, we will understand what the Apostle Paul means when he says, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all, light and momentary.

What were some of those light and momentary troubles the Apostle Paul faced? Oh, little things being beaten, stoned, starved, hated, rejected, thrown in prison. Other than that, though, super easy life. But he says in comparison to what is coming, those things are light and momentary. God will end suffering. That's his promise, and his promises are sure.

But it's not just for then. It is also for now. Because as I said last week, Jesus' mission is to heal this world. And he calls us, we get to participate with him in the making new of all things. Comfort the broken hearted, fix unjust systems, heal broken relationships. Our hope isn't just in heaven. Yes, it is there. But our hope is also in the fact that we are called to make it on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus meant that one quite literally.

And over the past 2,000 years, when God's people have obeyed that command, they've done things like cared for plague victims, start hospitals, build schools, eliminate slavery, on and on and on. God's promises are sure. We have access to him. He brings good out of bad. He is with us in it, and he will put a stop to

suffering someday in heaven, but progressively so here on earth as well. Those are just a few of the many promises God makes us that bring us hope.

And I tend to hope in things that I can see or touch or things that make me happy, you know, success, being well liked, health, stuff like that. But those things are not solid enough to bear the weight of our deepest hopes and our deepest longings, which are to be unconditionally loved, connected to the eternal God, and live a life of meaning and purpose. Everything else is just trying to fulfill eternal longings with temporary fixes. But deep down, we cannot escape the nagging suspicion that one roll of the dice, one bad year, will wipe it all away. But Jesus and his promises fulfill our deepest longings, and those promises will never be taken away, cannot be canceled, and that's our hope.

So then how do we access that hope so it actually kind of guides the way we live and how we feel and all that? How do these things become real to us? Well, first, focus on Jesus more than on the problem. And there's just an element of decision here. We're all gonna decide to believe something. Every person decides to believe something. So decide, I'm gonna believe Jesus, I'm gonna believe his promises are real and his promises are true. We're gonna make a decision either way.

We're also gonna decide what we focus on. We can decide to doom scroll social media all day long and spend more time consuming news than we spend with Jesus. But then, don't be surprised if you end up anxious and angry and fearful and depressed, right? Now, we don't deny our problems, don't deny the world's problems, but we can focus on Jesus more than our problems. And the way we do that is through the big four we always talk about: prayer, worship, scripture, community. Picture Jesus next to you because he is, and then tell him about your hurt, tell him about your fear, tell him about your disappointment, including your disappointment in him, and then listen for what he might say. Scripture, thoughts that he puts in your head, more of that and less on our problems.

And then second way to kind of access hope through God's promises, be defiant. Be defiant. It helps me sometimes to talk to my problems. Something I learned long ago when I was a college pastor. It helps me sometimes to speak to my fears, my hurts, my sorrows, and say, listen, you're not going to get the best of me. I refuse.

Say to the health crisis, you don't own me. Jesus promises that in life and in death, I belong to him. Therefore, I have hope. Say to the grief over some loss, grief, you're real, and grief, I need to feel you, but my life is not ruined because

of this loss. Jesus promises he will still love me, be with me, and give me hope, courage, and joy. Therefore, I have hope.

Say to all the problems we have in our country and in our world and in our divided politics, which matter, and we're called to make them better, but ultimately, my hope is not in some politician. It's not in this political party or that political party. My hope is not that flimsy. My hope is way sturdier than that. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness. And because he was raised from the dead, and because he lives, I can face tomorrow. That's where our hope is.

So then action steps for this week. First, do this week's exercise in the journal. You can find that journal on our website or on the app if you don't have one. And this week's exercise is fill in these blanks. I felt sad when, but Jesus gave me hope by. How? How did he give you hope? And one of the best ways to be encouraged in hope is to remember how Jesus has been faithful to us in the past. And if you can't think of an example, then ask him to give you one this week.

And then second, invite someone to church or a church-related event. Church event. Because there are a lot of people out there who need hope. There are a lot of people out there who need hope. And Jesus is the hope of the world. And one of the best ways to show people the hope we have in Jesus is your story. Which is why we're doing these journals. So at the end of this sermon series, you'll have a whole journal full of ways that Jesus has been good news to you that you can share with other people. Because the best way to lead people to Jesus is not by arguing with them, it's by talking about how good Jesus is over and over and over. So we're equipping you to do that.

Some of you have heard me tell this story before, but I think a good story needs to be told more than once about a family in my former church whose six year old son got cancer. And in spite of all the doctors and in spite of all the prayers, eventually he died. It was just this horrible ordeal. And one of the most life changing experiences I've ever had in a church service came a year after he died when his mom gave her testimony.

And she said, when our son got sick, I began reading from Genesis to Revelation, looking for the place where God promised to heal our son. But I could not find it. What I found instead on almost every page was God's promise to be with us in it and to bring good out of it. And she said, you know, the cancer years were the worst years of her life. But in some ways, she said, they were also the most precious years of our lives because our whole family experienced Jesus'

presence, not just theology that they knew, but it all became really real, like, oh my goodness, he is here, he is with us. We feel him and that gives us comfort.

And she said that through that experience, God also, he used it for good by changing her understanding of what winning looked like. You know, she was super successful in her career, and I always thought, that's what winning looks like. But she said, it changed my definition of winning because I saw my son winning by how closely he was connected to Jesus and the hope that that gave him and the joy that that gave him all the way to his final breath.

And she said, out of that, God gave her a desire to help kids, started to bring good things out of it by giving her this desire to help kids. So she took her business skills and is now CEO of a non-profit that helps under resourced kids get job training and get them into jobs so they can start new lives. It was horrible. And they grieved the loss of their son. But they also had a solid biblical hope based on Jesus' promise that he would be real for them, that he would be there, that they would experience him in a real supernatural powerful way, and that he brought good out of it.

And she's helping thousands of kids. And she knows she will see her son again someday in heaven. And she does not see that as a consolation prize. She sees that as the grand prize.

And at the end of her testimony, she said, I mean, her words are just burned in my mind. She said, you know, God never promised us an easy life. But for all the promises he makes, he keeps every one every single time.

The darker this world gets, the more it needs people of hope, people who are grounded in the promises of Jesus, that he is always with you. He calls you by name. He turns mourning into joy. He brings beauty out of ashes. He restores what was stolen, forgives fully, erases shame. He loves you as you are, where you are. He fights battles that you can't win alone. He gives strength to the weary. He comforts those who mourn. He makes a way where there is no way. Carries you when you're weak. He finishes what he starts. Gives hope that does not disappoint. Courage that will never falter. Joy that cannot be stopped by anything. He rewrites stories that seem over, brings good out of bad, life out of death, and he covers you with his grace. He redeems what looks wasted, and he revives what is dead, and he holds all your future in the palm of his hand.

And that is just a few of the many promises Jesus makes to you and that he makes to me. Whom then shall we fear? Whom then shall we fear?

Amen? Jesus, you are the hope of the world. You are the only hope of the world. So Lord, help us to believe your promises. Help us to experience your presence. Fill us with your hope, your resurrection hope, so that we can pass that hope on to a hurting and hopeless world. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures)

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

Talk:

- Think of a time that felt hopeless: how did Jesus meet you there, even in small ways?
- Where do you currently feel stuck or tired, and what would honest (not forced) hope look like right now?
- Who in your life is barely holding on and could use steady presence more than advice this week?

Action Plan:

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- Think of someone who feels stuck, heavy, or alone.
- Bring tangible hope: a visit, a meal, a text that says, 'I'm with you,' sit in silence, go on a walk, run an errand, or watch their kids for a few hours.
- No speeches. No silver lining. Hope = your steady presence.
- If they express longing, loneliness, or curiosity say, "If you ever want a place to rest and feel love, I'd love to bring you to ___ and offer one clear invitation: for a walk this week, dinner at my house, Sunday Worship, Alpha, Easter Party, Moms' Fellowship, Student D groups, etc..."

Not pressure. Just a door.

Closing Group Prayer:

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.