

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

A long, straight road stretches towards a mountain range at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the mountains are silhouetted against the bright light. The road has a dashed white line down the center and solid white lines on the sides.
NORTH STREET
CHURCH OF CHRIST

Hope in the Midst of Chaos

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.”

Romans 4:18¹

There are times in life when things can look bleak—a diagnosis, inflation, our crumbling culture, a death, another war somewhere in the world, addiction, loss of a job.

Whether it is personal chaos or chaos in the world, all of it can create serious anxiety for us and damper any hope we might have. We know we have promises, but sometimes those promises are difficult to hold onto when they seem so distant.

Abraham understood this. God promised him that he would be a great nation (Genesis 12:3), yet he had no children. He would live for another 25 years after that promise before his son Isaac would be born. At that point he was 100 years old. We can imagine how his hope must have seemed less sure with each passing year.

There are many things that can dim our hope. Because of this the writer of Hebrews encourages us to “...hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23). So, with the early Christians we pray, “Marana tha” (“Come Lord” – 1 Cor. 16:22).

As with previous interactive studies, you are encouraged to read one text a day for four days. Read it slowly, look at the question or instruction for the day, then read it again. Let the text soak into you. On Sunday I will preach on the subject matter for that week. Those in Home Groups will have an opportunity to follow up with a discussion about the daily readings and the sermon. May this series bless you and strengthen your hope.

ALBHG
Curtis

¹ All scriptures are from the New International Version, 2011.

The Chaos
February 13-19
Day 1
Job 1

There is no better place to begin talking about chaos than the life of Job. Job seemed to have a charmed life when a series of events, brought about by forces behind the scenes, began to disrupt and destroy his well-structured life. Notice how Job reacts to the catastrophes that come upon him. What sorts of catastrophes (either personal or universal) have altered the course of your life in a negative way? Write these and your response to them.

Day 2
Psalm 137

Due to her sin, God allowed the Babylonian empire to destroy the city of Jerusalem and march the inhabitants of the tribe of Judah into exile in Babylon. God later declared that the Babylonians had done more than he intended and that they would be punished accordingly. The anguish and vitriol expressed by the psalmist gives us an idea of the types of war crimes the Babylonians committed. If you had been in the shoes of the Jewish people, how would you have felt and how would you have expressed it?

Day 3
John 19:1-37

Whatever hopes the disciples of Jesus had were surely dashed when they saw their master beaten and nailed to a cross. We live in a sanitized world far removed from the brutality that so many others experience; even those states that execute criminals do it behind closed doors and in the most humane ways possible. This was not the experience of first century Jews. What would it have been like to have had the high hopes that Jesus gave those first disciples, only to see those hopes so brutally taken away?

Day 4
Revelation 21:1-22:5

The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic work of art that paints a picture of hope. Some followers of Jesus faced some of the same brutal treatment as their master while others were lured away from the kingdom of God by the forces behind the brutality. Earlier in the book some who had suffered asked the question that all who have hope ask: “How long?” How does the image painted in this reading help us to move forward in hope?

The Source
February 20-26
Day 1
Psalm 121

Who can really help you? In certain circumstances it may be a family member or a friend, while in others it may be the government, but there are some circumstances where no earthly person can provide the help we need. Hope is one of those circumstances. What are some things or people that we might be tempted to rely on other than the Lord?

Day 2
Psalm 71

The psalmist declares that God has seen him through some difficult times in life. The Lord has been his hope since he was young. What are some ways that the Lord has been your hope?

Day 3
Psalm 42

Do you have many conversations with yourself? This psalmist is having a conversation with himself. He must remind himself that the Lord is his hope, so he should not be downcast. What are some things that might make you question or forget that you have hope in the Lord and that you should not be downcast?

Day 4
Nehemiah 9:5b-37

Write down everything that Nehemiah said that the Lord did. What does this tell you about God?

Good Trouble

February 27-March 5

Day 1

Isaiah 40

In Isaiah 39 we read about God bringing the Babylonian empire down on the people of Judah because of her perpetual unfaithfulness and gross injustice. In chapter 40 Isaiah envisions a time when God will restore his people. After all that she had been through at the hand of the Babylonians, Israel might have wondered how or if God could bring this about. Under what conditions might we wonder the same thing?

Day 2

James 1:2-8

God is at work in us to make us the kinds of people who belong in the new creation. For that new creation to come to be in us, some of the old creation must be pressed out. This pressing out can be difficult and reminds us of the athletic saying: “No pain, no gain.” In this sense the trials are good trouble. How have the trials that you have faced helped you to become complete, lacking in nothing?

Day 3
Romans 5:1-5

As we have already seen in James, trials can help us to become complete (mature). In Romans Paul tells us that those trials/sufferings also lead us to hope. How is this so?

Day 4
2 Corinthians 12:1-10

The apostle Paul dealt with some great difficulties in his life (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-27). When Paul asked God to remove one, God told him, no. Whatever this difficulty was, God knew that it would cause Paul to rely on the Lord even more. When has trouble led you to rely on the Lord? How did this shape you?

Hope in Sorrow

March 6-12

Day 1

Ezekiel 37

In Ezekiel 33:21 a man comes to the people of Judah exiled in Babylon and announces that Jerusalem has fallen. This announcement came thirteen years after some of the people had been taken to Babylon. No doubt these people, living in a foreign land, had hopes of returning to their home, and now they had heard that their home had been destroyed. It is in this context that Ezekiel sees the valley of dry bones and hears this question: “Can these bones live?” Ezekiel seems unsure as he says, “O Lord God, you know.” Have you experienced a time when you wondered if the bones could live? A time of overwhelming sorrow?

Day 2

Jeremiah 29:1-19

For those who might have thought that the dry bones in Babylon were going to be revived soon, Jeremiah’s letter must have come as a disappointment. It would be seventy years before God would cover those bones with flesh and breathe his Spirit into them. While Jeremiah sent good news, it was news of something that many of them would not live to see. How can you live in hope knowing that you may not see the hope arrive?

Day 3
2 Corinthians 1:3-11

While we believe that God has something planned for us that is beyond description (See Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17), we also know that there is often much sorrow before we arrive at that blessed destination. In this text Paul says that God comforts us in our sorrows. How has God comforted you?

Day 4
Exodus 4

We have long sung the hymn that begins “Does Jesus care...?” A similar question must have been on the hearts of the people of Israel as they endured year after year of slavery in Egypt. So, when Moses arrives on the scene and they learn that God is concerned about them, they bow down to worship. As we are sometimes overwhelmed by the troubles of life, we might easily forget that “yes, he cares.” What are some things that have reminded you of this?

The Down Payment

March 13-19

Day 1

John 14:1-5

After Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he began speaking more fervently to his disciples about his departure. The more he spoke, the more anxious they became. They were anxious about the future. In what ways do you feel anxious about the future?

Day 2

Ephesians 1:1-14

To calm the anxiety of the disciples, Jesus said that he would not leave them orphaned (John 14:18). He promised to send them another advocate (counselor) - the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Paul tells us that the Spirit is a deposit that guarantees our inheritance. In what ways does the Holy Spirit provide a guarantee for you?

Day 3
2 Corinthians 3:7-18

In this passage the apostle Paul refers to a story from the Old Testament in which Moses met God. As a result, his face shone so bright that Aaron and the others were afraid, so Moses covered his face with a veil (Exodus 34). Paul refers to this story to express that the ministry of the Spirit is even greater than what those people experienced, because the ministry of the Spirit transforms us from one degree of glory to another. How are you able to discern the work of the Spirit in you versus your own work towards transformation?

Day 4
Galatians 5:13-26

In this text of scripture, the apostle Paul makes a distinction between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He then encourages us to keep in step with the Spirit. How does “keeping in step with the Spirit” contribute to our hope?

Living Hope

March 20-26

Day 1

1 Peter 1:3-9

A dead hope seems contradictory, yet Peter seems to imply that there is such by referring to our hope as a “living hope.” Most likely he is countering the hopelessness of those who lived in paganism. How would you describe the contrast between our hope and the future expectations of the culture around us?

Day 2

Romans 12:9-21

There are times when it can be difficult to keep hope alive. If this is so, how much more difficult is it to be “joyful in hope?” And yet this is what the apostle encourages us to do. You will notice that most of the comments in this scripture are about leaning into what we believe by living out our faith. How does doing this help to increase our joy?

Day 3

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

No one is immune to grief. If you love and then lose someone, then you will grieve; however, the apostle tells these Christians in Thessalonica that their grief is not like that of the pagan world around them, because their loss is not “goodbye” but “see you later.” How does such a perspective alter your grief?

Day 4

1 Thessalonian 5:1-11

It seems like every year there is someone telling us that they have deciphered the code of the Bible and that they now know when the Lord will return, but each time they are wrong. Such predictions have a way of making us expectant, but they also have a way of dimming our expectancy each time they fail to deliver. In contrast, Paul tells us that we should not concern ourselves with such predictions but to always live as if the coming will be tomorrow. How difficult is it to live this way knowing that it has not happened for over two thousand years?

Prayerful Waiting

March 27-April 2

Day 1

Revelation 6:1-11

There are times, either personally or globally, when the chaos in the world seems overwhelming. This was the case for followers of Jesus in the book of Revelation. Those who suffered were wondering when God was going to step in and end the chaos. Many of the prayers in scripture are laments. What role does lament play in our hope?

Day 2

Philippians 4:4-7

Rather than be anxious about the future, the apostle Paul encourages us to be prayerful instead. Specifically, he mentions bringing our requests before God. What role do requests play in our hope?

Day 3
Psalm 9

Because the chaos can seem overwhelming, we often forget about the times that God *has* stepped in and delivered us. The psalmist takes stock of what God has done while also asking God to do more. What role does thankfulness play in our hope?

Day 4
Psalm 33

Once in a while we have some experience where we stand in awe. You may have felt this way standing before the Grand Canyon or watching the sun set over the ocean, or maybe you felt this way when the doctor informed you that the disease was gone. The psalmist has had such an experience and it has led him to praise. What role does praise play in our hope?

He is Risen

April 3-9

Day 1

Matthew 22:23-32

The Sadducees, accepting only the Torah as scripture and believing that the Torah said nothing about resurrection, denied the idea that anyone would return from the dead. Jesus implies that the Torah does speak of the resurrection by referencing Exodus 3:6 in Matthew 22:32, but those who did believe in the resurrection may have only accepted the idea in theory. After all, they had not witnessed it in their own lives. How would you react if you were told that someone you know has been raised?

Day 2

Luke 24:1-12

Peter demonstrates that you can believe in the resurrection but be skeptical about reports of it actually taking place. He witnesses the empty tomb but walks away bewildered. Put yourself in Peter's shoes. What are you to think about the empty tomb?

Day 3

1 Corinthians 15:12-32

There were obviously still some within the Christian community who balked at the notion of the resurrection. In response the apostle Paul addresses the question in detail. What does he say are the implications of the resurrection for us?

Day 4

Colossians 3:1-17

In several places in the New Testament we read about the present reality of the resurrection and the new creation in the lives of believers. The apostle implies this in today's reading by suggesting that they have already been raised. He is likely referring to their baptism (see Romans 6:1-4). What does he tell us it means to be "raised" people?

Home

April 10-16

Day 1

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Kenny Chesney famously sang “Everybody wants to go to heaven...but nobody wanna go now.” Paul does not share this opinion, but we might. What is it that keeps us from groaning for our new home?

Day 2

2 Peter 3:1-13

Peter speaks of a place where righteousness dwells. In other parts of the New Testament we hear of the renewal, restoration, and unity of all things (Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:21; Ephesians 1:10). We might think of *us* becoming new, but how does it change our perspective if we imagine *everything* becoming new?

Day 3
Revelation 21:1-22:5

We now return to a passage that gives us hope in the midst of chaos. When you read this passage, what is it that you long for the most?

Day 4
Hebrews 10

Both the tabernacle and the temple were meant to imitate Eden, and Eden was to be heaven on earth (Hebrews 8:5). Once sin entered the picture, the gateway back into Eden was blocked (Genesis 3:24). In yesterday's reading we saw again that our future home is depicted as Eden. The writer of Hebrews expresses that Jesus is our high priest who takes us *not* into the copy, but into the real home of God. Because of this, he encourages us to hold unswervingly to the hope we profess because God is faithful. How has God's faithfulness in the past allowed you to hold on to this hope?