

Trumpets Is a Day of Hope

Our Hope Is In God

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We are going to begin the sermon this afternoon in Jeremiah 30: 4-6 with scriptures that are certainly appropriate for this day.

Jeremiah 30: 4-6 And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus says the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask you now, and see whether a man does travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?

I think we all agree that the period of time we are living in is leading to the fulfillment of this prophecy. I want you to notice first, at least just very briefly, that Israel and Judah are both named in that prophecy. When you compare this to the fact that Jeremiah lived over 100 years *after* Israel went into captivity to Assyria, and yet this prophecy is addressed to both Israel and Judah, you will understand then that this an *end-time* prophecy. There is going to come a time where these troubles are going to come upon *both* of those nations.

This is a prophecy of a time of intense troubles that are unique to man's history, and these things are going to impact upon us. I am aware that people's personal problems are escalating, and relations between nations are precarious, to say the least. When troubles intensify, people begin looking ever more fervently for solutions. At some point they will begin looking in every direction in order to have what they feel will be a successful resolution.

On the other hand, this day, despite its heavy emphasis on troubles of a very dangerous proportion, is in an overall sense a day that ought to give all of us the greatest of hope. Very much is going to happen between now and Christ's return. Herbert Armstrong used to say that one-third of the Bible is prophecy, and 90% of that one-third pertains to the time just ahead. Even now, brethren, I think you will agree that we are feeling a sense of oppression, that things are closing in on us.

Does not the prophecy, as well as past history, show that the Christian is going to become a pariah of society, perhaps directly harassed on every side, and perhaps indirectly swept into persecutions aimed at others? Christians before us had to undergo this kind of treatment, so why should we believe that we will escape at all? It is a truth, that if we do not have our minds focused on the steadfastness of Jesus Christ and God's truth, we may very well find ourselves without hope.

The end result of the general drift of events of our day is clearly evidence when the history of man's civilization covering the last 6,000 years is viewed. Mankind's history, whether it is written

regarding Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, or Israel, shows that the solution to man's competitive and greedy nature has not been found. Nothing has changed in that regard. In our day, human nature continues to dominate life unchecked, and thus many people on earth live desperate lives that are fraught with many fears, merely hoping to survive. Even if one's life is not desperate, some measure of hopelessness will be a part of almost everybody's life.

The book, *The Final Conclave* (a novel written by Malachi Martin), focuses on the election of a pope. Beginning on page 201 he introduces two main characters. One's name is Angelico, and the other is Dominico. They are involved in a discussion regarding the religious and political makeup of the College of Cardinals. This is very interesting, because if you know a little bit of the background of Malachi Martin, you will understand that he was a Jesuit priest, and he spent the bulk of his priesthood right in the Vatican. Though he was an American, that is where he spent his time.

Malachi Martin's Angelico asserts that 40% of the College of Cardinals is firm and are genuine believers in the Catholic faith. In addition to that, he says 33% profess loyalty, but do not believe the doctrines of the Catholic Church. These men are interested in power and membership in a gilt-edged club with a large measure of deceit.

The discussion continued, showing that the remaining 27% is playing an incredible game in which they are constantly hedging their bets. These fence-sitting cardinals are nothing more than prudent agnostics. They have a hollow hope that the teachings of the Catholic Church are correct, but they are not really sure.

Now the straddling-the-fence problem is not unfounded in Israel either.

I Kings 18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt you between two opinions? [They were fence-straddling.] If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him: And the people answered him not a word.

Now why do you think they did not answer? They were still fence-straddling. They were waiting to see which way the wind would blow. They wanted to see who was going to win this confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and then maybe they would go in that direction.

The result, Malachi Martin added, was that these cardinals soft-pedaled their faith. They looked for the way that the wind was blowing. They drifted with the tide, and they hung on, because they reasoned, "Who knows? The church might just be right." You see, they really did not know. Maybe they do have reasons to hope (they think), but brethren, we cannot afford to be ambivalent like them. We had better know and trust what our hope is in, because it is a matter of fact that we have no other resource to turn to.

I could not help wondering, as the Feast of Trumpets approached, what our attitude is toward the Feast of Trumpets, because it vividly portrays extreme opposites in terms of problems and solutions. Does there really exist in us an anticipation (earnest expectation in a major way), looking forward to its culmination? I include within that some sense of anticipating even the

terrifying problems that the Feast of Trumpets portrays, because when we begin to understand it, know it and believe it, we understand that these problems are actually part of the solution. Maybe they are a large part of the solution.

Do we really believe, with enough intensity, that we have hope, or is it possible that we too are hedging our bet? Are we like the prudent agnostic cardinals, or are we deeply committed loyalists? Are we deeply committed loyalists who have thoroughly examined God's word and have compared it with man's history and have seen that there is truly no other solution than a change of government and spirit from man under Satan, to man under God, thus reversing what happened in I Samuel 8: 1-7?

A number of years ago I gave a series of thirteen Bible Studies on the book of Hebrews. I then followed that with a sermon at the Feast of Tabernacles that was a summary of those Bible Studies. The book of Hebrews was written to a group of "older-in-the-faith" Christians in an unnamed location. Looking back from our perspective on those Hebrews, from our point of history, we can see that they were only about six years away from the destruction of the Temple and the end of the Jewish way of life in their homeland. An end was staring them right in the face.

They could not see it clearly then, and besides that they had a problem that motivated the writing of the book of Hebrews. The problem was in their heart. They were not guilty of any grievous sin. In fact the word "sin" only appears three times in thirteen chapters in the book of Hebrews. But at the same time, though not guilty of sin, they were losing their grip on their faith, which perhaps in the long run was even worse.

They were rapidly becoming weary in well-doing. This is because that when trouble mounts and impacts on us more and more frequently, human nature has a powerful tendency to become apathetic. In other words, when there is no apparent solution, one simply lays back and gives up, saying "What is the use?"

I also remember Herbert Armstrong saying that the Bible was written more for this end-time generation than any other. Here he was not concerned about prophecy. He was concerned about the entire Bible. I never really doubted what he said, but I wondered how did what he say apply in a practical way.

We do not know how many Christians—those who came before us—ever saw the entire Bible, because the printing press was not even invented until around the 1400s. An awful lot of people could have come and gone as members of the Christian Church, from the first century to the fourteenth century. And then even after the printing press was invented, and still operated by hand, how many people actually saw an entire Bible?

They did not have rapid communication devices like we have today. How did those Christians in former times judge events that were going on around them? Were they misled by their interpretation? Did they lose hope? Did they feel for a certainty that they were living from time to time in the end-time? Were they wrong in their judgment? How did they react?

When you begin to think of this, you are going to know there has never been a generation that has known so much about the word of God as we know, having the entire Bible available. We

have the entire Bible not just in one translation, but in literally scores of different translations that are available to us. We have no excuse not to be prepared with sufficient faith, with sufficient understanding, with sufficient character and endurance and perseverance and hope to carry us through this very difficult time that is coming.

I know that I personally can see ever more clearly how prophecy's subject-material fits events that this Church era is going through. We are going to go through a tumultuous period that has even now begun to exert its impact, and in some cases severely testing our faith. But more and worse is going to come. In an overall sense, brethren, this is good, because as I said, the problems are part of the solution, but we are going to get caught in them. There is no avoiding them if you want to remain a Christian, because God has willed that we go through them.

Now the degree that we go through them, and the length of time we go through them, is hidden from us. It may vary from person to person. In fact I am sure it will, because God watches over us far more carefully than our parents ever watched over us. He does not want to lose anybody. He wants to get the most and the best out of us so that we are prepared for the job He has for us when we go into His kingdom. Jesus said, "I go and prepare a place for you."

We are going to have to go through very much in some cases. Some of us may have to go into the Tribulation, not as punishment, not because we have been bad, but simply because God *wants* us to go through it, because it is good for us. We are going to make the kind of witness necessary to glorify Him during that period of time.

I know we used to think that there was something wrong with a person who might have to go through the Tribulation. Not so! We should not think that way. It is simply that the Boss said, "I want you to go through it." It is His will, and we follow through with it. He must feel if we have to go through it, that we are prepared for it. Because of our faith in Him we *will* be able to do it, but it is going to be stressful and scary. I kid you not. There are going to be times of great confusion, and how can one know what is right. There is insight on this subject in many books in the New Testament, and of course one of them is the theme of this day—the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

The Day of Trumpets is to me much like a hammer, as the business end (the hammer's head which drives the nail home) fastens together, and gets the job done. Sometimes, even in that case, you hit your thumb or something, and you get hurt. But the business end accomplishes what it is meant to do. This can give one a great deal of satisfaction as one sees whatever one is building go together.

But on the other end of that hammer is the claw, which is for ripping out and for correcting mistakes. Sometimes, when using the claw, there is destruction of the wood into which the nail has been driven, and so it is with the Feast of Trumpets. It is capable of lifting, encouraging, inspiring, and giving sense and reason to life. It fills us with hope and right direction for our energies, but it also has its somber, painful, and destructive side as well.

Richard took us into the book of Joel, and I want us to go back there as well to read a selection of verses. Listen to the advice. This is a warning to you and me. We are a kingdom of priests, and God says through Joel:

Joel 1:13-15 Gird yourselves, and lament, you priests: howl, you ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. Sanctify you a fast, call a solemn assembly, [That is what we are doing now. We are assembled in a solemn assembly.] gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD, Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the almighty *shall it come*. [There is no holding it back.]

Joel 2:1-2 Blow you the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: [The holy mountain now is the church.] let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD comes, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong: there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

He is prophesying of the army that is going to come upon Israel.

Joel 2:12-16 Therefore also now says the LORD, turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil. Who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion [the church], sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

Brethren, the warning has gone out to the church. In short, what God has said is, "Get ready!" "Prepare for the worst." We are right on the threshold of the greatest period of testing and trial ever to come on mankind, and we have got to have something to sustain us if we are to endure it.

Now Jesus said to His disciples that love is going to wax cold. (Matthew 24:12) "But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." Without saying it directly, He is saying that some of His brethren are going to go through that terrible time. If God permits us to escape it, then great. That is why it says, "Who knows? Maybe He will leave a blessing behind." We do not know that.

He is our Lord and Master. He owns us. He redeemed us. He bought us with a price, and He can do whatever He want to do with us, and we committed ourselves to it. That is part of the deal.

We do not want to be like the Israelites and prostitute ourselves as they did in faithlessness to the government of Almighty God. We are not without warning. God expects us to use the warning in order to be both comforted and prepared.

When I was in the Worldwide Church of God, I got the feeling that many were playing the same incredible game as Angelico and Dominico were, of being prudent agnostics, of believing, but not truly committed, as shown by their conduct. They were acquainted with God, but not really seeking to know God. They were just kind of hanging loose, hedging their bet, floating around, ready to go in any direction offering the most comfortable non-sacrificial solution. In that kind of circumstance, the church often merely becomes nothing more than a fraternal organization.

I think there is good evidence that this awareness I had was justified, since so many people that we formerly fellowshiped with in the Worldwide Church of God have simply disappeared, absorbed back into the world around them.

Let us go back to the New Testament, in I Corinthians 13:13. This is the "love" chapter, and love is still part of the subject material when we get to verse 13, but it mentions "hope" as well.

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abides [or lives, or continues] faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Hope is one of the three greatest virtues of the Christian faith. Hope is a positive, future-oriented quality toward something that someone expects but does not yet possess. Hope has two facets to it that we need to be aware of. The one is stated in I Peter 1:13.

I Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and *hope* to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here Peter is referring to a motivating, emotional quality *within* one expecting success or good. The key word is "within." It is a motivating, emotional quality *within* one expecting success or good.

The second aspect of it is the one that is used far more frequently in the Bible, and it appears in Hebrews 6:18. This is just one example of many places in which hope is used in this manner.

Hebrews 6:18-19 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation [a strong sense of encouragement] who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which enters into that within the veil.

This is a very interesting verse. There is a great deal in those two verses. But here hope is seen as being *external*. Even though we carry the thought, the understanding, the knowledge of it in our own minds and it appears to be internal, it is actually *external* to those who have it. This

hope is something that we flee to in refuge, and this hope has entered behind the veil for us.

The second one, which is the one more frequently used in the Bible, is seen as what *stirs* us and produces the hope within. It is what the Christian's hope (the object, the concept, the idea, the fact) is in. For instance, our hope can be *in* God, as it may say. Our hope may be *in* Jesus. Our hope may be in salvation. Our hope may be in God's promises, God's word, eternal life, God's steadfast love, His grace, and the resurrection from the dead and sharing the glory of God.

We are going to take a look at how much hope played a part in the first-century Christians' lives. We are going to see a little bit about their reaction. We are going to see also a little bit about how frequently hope is referred to time and time again in the epistles, especially the epistles of Paul and of Peter. They referred to hope very frequently, helping us to understand that it is *major* part of what keeps us going. It is important that we make effort to build it, strengthen it, make it stronger, and use it a lot more frequently.

We are going to go first to the book of Acts, chapter 1. I think that you know the circumstance here is the ascension of Jesus Christ. He has been resurrected. It is 50 days later, and the day of Pentecost is just about to occur. What is so interesting is that in this really significant time in the lives of the apostles, guess what was on their mind? We see it here in verse 6.

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks!" What was on their mind? The kingdom of God, and seeing it established *right now!*

We should not be unfamiliar with that kind of an attitude at all. If we are anything at all like they, we too would like to see the kingdom of God established *right now*. You had better believe it!

Acts 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in his own power.

I do not know whether they understood that at first, but we ought to be able to understand when we think of it ourselves, that it is somewhat of a disappointment that the time for the establishment of the kingdom of God, of the coming of Jesus Christ is something that God is purposely withholding from us. I am sure that He has good reason for doing that. I am sure that in His wisdom He can see He is going to be able to produce far more that is better and good in us if we do not know when Christ is going to return.

I feel very certain, just thinking of myself, we would relax in a way that is not good if we knew when Christ was going to return. And so not knowing gives us much greater opportunity to use faith in trusting God. But He says in verse 8:

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and

in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

I used to think, that in one sense, Jesus' answer to them was somewhat enigmatic. In a way it is. But on the other hand, even though He told them "It is not for you to know the time or the season," which to them must have been somewhat discouraging, He came right back with something that was very encouraging. He told them they were going to receive the Holy Spirit and power which would enable them to endure that time, and do the job that was of the highest priority to them right at that time.

That principle still applies for us. We do not know when Christ is going to come. We do not know when the kingdom of God is going to be established. We do not know how much trouble we are going to have to go through. But at the same time, He is saying to us just what He said to them. "You will be given the power that will enable you to endure." "You will be given the power to enable you to overcome and grow during this period of time through which I want you to serve Me."

We are not being left alone. We are not being left without resources to be able to do what we have to do. But it is nice to know what was on their mind on this very significant occasion. It is good to keep that right at the forefront of your mind as well just how important that is. In the model prayer—called the "Lord's prayer,"—it says "Thy kingdom come." This request comes near the beginning of this prayer. It is a top priority we ask God for that to occur.

I would have to guess that the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God was a far more compelling drive in their mind than ours because of their visible and audible firsthand face-to-face relationship with Christ. It was a major part of the good news that He frequently preached.

It was a while, I think, before they realized, and then came to grips with the fact that they had to revise their authority. Christ told them what their top priority was. "First you have got to preach the gospel. " They had to revise their priority, realizing that this came first.

Now let us ask a question. Did their hope wane as to what they originally put their hope in? Did the establishment of God's kingdom right away seem ever more distant as time went on?

We will read I Thessalonians 5 because people who research into these things say that this was the Apostle Paul's first epistle—that it was written sometime around the summer or fall of AD 51. Some sections of this epistle show that the return of Jesus Christ was still very much on their mind. Paul was converted, perhaps, in 33 AD. This was 18 years later. Time had gone by, and some of the original followers had died by this time, and time was not waiting on those who remained alive. Now what was to become of those *whodid* remain alive?

II Thessalonians 2 was written a few months after I Thessalonians. I think Paul wrote it from Corinth. It took time for that letter of I Thessalonians to get there and for people to listen to sermons that were preached from it, to analyze what it was that Paul said, and come up with a number of questions. The epistle of II Thessalonians addresses some of the questions and some of the responses the people made to what Paul said in his messages.

II Thessalonians 2:1-2 Now we beseech you, brethren, by *the*

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him [right into the kingdom of God], That you be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

It is interesting to think about what Paul is saying there. It might not be at hand! Then again, it could mean Paul was saying that it is at hand!

II Thessalonians 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

I am sure Paul put that in there so they would understand these are evidences that the return of Christ is near, but it had not happened yet. There had not been a falling away, and there had not been the man of sin being revealed. Paul was gently telling them, giving them evidence by which they could evaluate that the return of Christ was not immediately around the corner for those people. That might have been quite discouraging to them as they began to analyze it. But I think that we can see, that in 51 AD, the return of Christ was very much on their mind.

In addition to this, II Thessalonians 3 deals with the issue that there were some in Thessalonica who had quit their jobs because of *misinterpreting* Paul's sermons, and they became busybodies while waiting things out. Not good.

On the one hand, brethren, we are to live our lives always anticipating Christ's imminent return, partly because we do not know when we are going to die, and our judgment ends. On the other hand, we are also to live and work as though things will never end. Because nobody knows when Christ is going to return, we are therefore to do our job with all of our might, as Solomon said, and because we serve the Lord Christ, as Paul said.

We are to do every job as well as we can, not carelessly cutting corners, assuming that it is all going to blow away in just a year or so. That approach is not a godly attitude. Those people described in chapter 3 were just waiting things out because they had it in their mind that Christ was going to return right soon. Brethren, that is sheer presumptuousness, carelessness that God certainly does not appreciate in His children, because that is not the way He does things. We are to imitate Him. We are to work as He does. I think you can see His handiwork. He does pretty good work, does He not? The things that He builds last. They are good-quality work.

So what do we have here? In practical fact, there is a tension between the two extremes that must be balanced. Jesus said, "I work, and My Father works." We are to imitate them materially and spiritually. Time is rushing by, and those waiting things out then were castigated, and time is not waiting for us either.

II Thessalonians 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity does already work: only he who now lets will let until he be taken out of the way.

What is interesting to me here is that Paul affirmed the "mystery of iniquity" was already working *then*. Look how long it has taken! We are 1900 and some years *later*, and it has taken that long, and it is coming toward a head. I think God gave us that as an evidence so we would understand and think about how He thinks in terms of time. It is not the same as with us. We want things done bang! bang! bang!—just like that! But that is not the mind of God. He will do it in His time.

The "mystery of iniquity" is coming to a head, but it has been working for over 1900 years. We are living at the time, from everything we can see, that this "mystery of iniquity" is finally going to reach its climax. Let us not do what the first century Christians did in II Thessalonians 3. Do not let down just because we can see a few things that are occurring.

As I said, II Thessalonians was written just a few months after I Thessalonians, so we are, let us say, up to about 52 AD. Meanwhile, the pressure is mounting. The Jewish civilization is in turmoil, and it is going to end in less than two decades, and the church is already experiencing more *internal* turmoil. Nero is alive, and in about one decade, from the time of the writing of II Thessalonians, he will be severely persecuting Christians, tarring them, burning them, throwing them to lions for the public's pleasure. By that time Christians are being martyred, and *still* no Jesus Christ. But conditions are ripe for people to lose hope.

Not too long after II Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul wrote I and II Corinthians. In both books the resurrection plays a part, especially in I Corinthians 15. It was on the people's mind. It has been 1900 years since then.

I Peter 1:7-10 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Receiving the end [or the goal] of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.

By this time we are in the mid 60s AD, and Peter writes an epistle of hope. That is his main subject. He is exhorting people to hang on.

As we just saw here in verse 7, it is most clear that trials have positive purpose, and they are ordained of God. They are part of the refining process that prepares, shapes, and makes us holy. But the flip side of that is they can destroy us if we let them.

In II Peter 3, a couple of more years go by. Again, the commentators feel that Peter wrote this about AD 67. Now the problems in the church are in the open, and the church is really in turmoil. We are getting close to 70 AD. False prophets appear, as chapter 2 taught.

II Peter 2:1-3 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and

bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not.

I bring that up in order for you to realize that what happened in the Worldwide Church of God also happened in the first century church. False prophets came into the church and brought great turmoil upon it as they were approaching the end. It is one of the signs. Now their end was 70 AD. Our end is really the return of Jesus Christ. But this is something that we have had to face, and even at this time we are still faced with it as well.

The problem in the church was in the open, and the church was really in turmoil. The false prophets had appeared and they had been plundering the church. I am sure that the people then—those who were faithful—must have been asking: "Where *is* He?" I am sure many were asking that. People were reasoning, and the reasoning of some went like this: "Since He is not here, perhaps I have time to do my thing." What I here called "my thing," the apostles called that "walking after their own desires." They were getting their minds off God's desire and onto their own.

II Timothy 2:15-18 Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as does a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already: and overthrow the faith of some.

Now we have people telling us not that the resurrection has occurred, but that Christ is not going to come now, we have heard, for yet a couple hundred years. How bad is it going to get in a couple hundred years? Can we possibly survive that long at the rate things are going? I am not talking about just surviving in our own little group. I am talking about the whole world surviving, considering how the nations are angry and are competing with one another.

Can things possibly go on for that long of a period of time, when we have weapons available that can wipe mankind out completely? Mankind's history shows that eventually those extremely destructive weapons are always used! When some madman sees some particular advantage, those weapons will be used. Man will take those chances, because human nature gambles, and some human nature in some people gambles recklessly with other people's lives.

I think that is stupid to be telling church members we are going to have to wait a couple hundred years for the return of Christ, but that idea is out there floating amongst the churches.

II Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are his. And, Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

This was Paul's last epistle. Paul was martyred in May or June of AD 68, so this epistle may have been written somewhere in the spring of AD 68. We are less than just a little bit over two years away from the destruction of the Temple in August AD 70, but already in AD 68 the siege of Jerusalem was beginning. It lasted for two years before Jerusalem finally fell. But the siege was already beginning, and still no Christ. But His return is still being mentioned in Paul's epistles, so it was on people's minds. They were thinking about it.

During the first 30 or 40 years of the first century, the church went through three major doctrinal problems that had to be overcome. They are:

Understanding "justification by faith" in Christ's blood. (This is addressed as early as Acts 15.)

Understanding the balance between law and grace. This is addressed in many chapters of the Bible, especially in those that Paul wrote. It is interesting, brethren, that the churches today calling themselves Christian still do not understand the balance between law and grace.

The second coming of Jesus Christ.

As time passed, the pressure mounted. This one became ever more important and naturally led people to believe that they had plenty of time to overcome. "My Lord delays His coming." Is this not what people today are saying? Are they not saying that Christ is not going to come for 200 years?

What happened, brethren, is that as the time for His return did not occur, the delay seemed to lead the people to lose their focus, to lose interest, to lose their hope, and to drift. That is what provided the background for the book of Hebrews. It is an almost incredible truth the Bible shows, that as we approach the end, some people go to sleep, others become Laodicean, and others simply give up.

Matthew 24:42-46 Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall *find so doing*.

We are to work! I am not talking so much about our jobs, I am talking about working on Christian life, in growing and overcoming.

Matthew 24:47-51 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming: And shall begin to smite his

fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder. [He will not make it.]

So why do we have to even be warned about such an attitude developing? It is because God knows human nature. There is a tendency to drift towards extremes. Either, being distracted, we will play while Rome burns, or else lose hope, become discouraged, become apathetic, and drift aimlessly. In either case, striving to keep one's focus on one's calling and election is a major part of the solution.

Brethren, if you do not get anything else out the sermon, I hope you get this: the striving to keep one's focus on one's calling and election is something *one must do*. There are two reasons for this. The first is that we are a very special people to God, and the second is that *nobody else can do it for you. Nobody!* Everybody has to do it for himself. It cannot be transferred from one person to another. It absolutely cannot. The only One who can give you hope so that you can endure is God and His Son Jesus Christ. That comes from them, because you are working at developing the relationship with them.

I Peter 1:1-6 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto *diving hope* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

Again brethren, remember that this was written in AD 65, and Peter is reminding people *who they are!* I just said we have to do this because we are a very special people to God. Peter focuses in on the term "election." Election is the very ground of consolation (encouragement) because it means that God *knows* us. What kind of a gift is that? We are not a faithless blob to Him. He knows us personally, and is watching over our lives. This word "election" here means "those sought out." Do you understand that? *He sought us out!* And so believing, understanding, taking action on this is a major part of our hope; that is, that we are indeed *special* and we are known of God.

He also uses the term "foreknowledge." It was used in order to intensify "election," because when the two of them are taken together in this context, it means that we were not only foreseen, but that our relationship to Him was *made* to occur, because we would have never

found God on our own. Peter then adds to this "sanctification." In this case it means not merely set apart, but dedicated for obedience. Peter even mentions that. And so God knows us, and He knows us not merely because He wants to save us, but because He wants us to obey Him.

All three of these taken together indicate a tremendous gift that not many people on earth have been given. It is also a humbling responsibility, because every gift carries with it the responsibility of making proper use of it in service to God's purpose. What Peter is dealing with here in this first chapter is *why we can have hope!* It is because we are *elected* of God. He *sought us out purposely* in order to make us acquainted with Him. Peter is showing God as the Author of an act of mercy by which we are given a sure hope of being brought into our inheritance. We should be very conscious of this without being maudlin or self-righteous.

Peter says that we have been begotten to a living hope. We were begotten once in our mother's womb so that we could be physically born. Now we are begotten *again* so that we can be *born* again spiritually into the kingdom of God. It is a living hope, because Christ is alive, and He absolutely will carry out His God-given responsibility to us in God's behalf.

I Peter 1:20-21 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that *your* faith and hope might be in God.

Do you understand what that means? All of our hope rises in the fact of our election, added to the fact that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. The resurrection is the proof that we have hope, and since He is living at the right hand of God, He will discharge His duties as High Priest in our behalf. And hope, if it is there, will invigorate us to action. It will strengthen our will. It will give us courage and perseverance to endure.

Recently Lance Armstrong has been in the news because of winning the *Grand Prix* of bicycling for the fifth time. I think only one other person has ever done this. That is a grueling accomplishment. It may be one of the most grueling of all athletic endeavors. It calls for a major portion of discipline, exhausting mental and physical energy, and demanding sacrificing on his part. After he won it, he announced that his wife was divorcing him. When he was asked to comment, he said that he sacrificed his marriage and his son for the sake of fame. Now his powerful competitive desire and the hope of accomplishing was what drove him on. In this case his hope was in a sheer vanity.

Now hope gives reason and substance to faith so that love can be produced so that we can hope without futility. Hope is essential, because man has a capacity for memory, and that is mostly bad. This produces cynicism and scorn and sarcasm. Man also has the power to think spatially and anticipate and plan for a positive future. But without a reasonable expectation of success for what is not vanity, what good is education, or what good is going through a lot of terrible experiences? What good is a matter done in preparation for receiving that kind of hope? That is one of man's gravest problems today. There are many problems, but few correct answers, because man is being boxed into a corner without reasonable hope for any positive solution.

I Peter 1:4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.

Think about this in comparison to Lance Armstrong's hope.

I Peter 1:5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Not only do we have hope, but our hope is in an inheritance, that unlike Canaan, it cannot be invaded, ravished, or polluted. Neither is it subject to decay or defilement. Neither will it be governed by inept self-centered and dictatorial rulers, and unlike Armstrong's hope, ours is not vanity.

In addition to that, all the while that we are still in the flesh, we are "kept." That means guarded. It means garrison. It is a military term given to ensure that we have every opportunity to achieve it. Peter used this word to encourage us of the continual activity of God to ensure that we will be there to inherit the kingdom of God. The mere fact that we have to be kept and guarded implies that we are going to face danger, but we will also have deliverance at hand because God is always there on the job, though we do not always exercise the faith to act as though we really believe that He is there.

In II Peter 2:9 Peter says "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations." God will preserve, but that does not eliminate our striving to take care of our salvation. God is aware of us, and that is an abiding comfort. Placing our hopes in the right object and making the effort to achieve it is something that no one else can do for us. We must do these things for ourselves, just as surely as no one could do the things for Armstrong so that he could win the races.

Romans 8:28-31 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Now there is our hope! But he goes further than that!

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Whatever we need He will not hold it back. That is how He guards us. That is how He keeps us. That is how He protects and garrisons us. We never have to fear that we are in over our head. We know that by ourselves we are going to be in over our head, but God is right there and He

promises that He will give us whatever we need in order to make it.

We will finish in I Peter 1:13-15. Again, this is a wonderful book on hope.

I Peter 1:13-16 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ: As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conduct. Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy.

Here are the practical implications of this wonderful hope. This is where hope can go to work for us and do wonders. God's calling and purpose is wonderful, but it is not intended by Him to set us off on a state of daydreaming. What Peter is doing here is a "call to arms." Peter is saying, "Pull yourself together!" "Roll up your sleeves!" "Give hard thought, and wrestle with the practical implications of salvation."

Brethren, remember the church is that community where God's truth is taken seriously, and His mind is being formed in its members. Peter is saying, "Look brothers, let us not be superficial about this. Keep cool. Do not be impetuous. Avoid excesses. Live a plain life. Work hard, but set your hope in God's grace, not in your willpower."

Remember always that your obedience is to a gracious Person, not a coldly calculating judge, nor to society. Holiness is not sanctimoniousness. It is being separated for a special purpose by special instructions and discipline. We have been called to perform a unique purpose. We have been called to glorify God by our lives as a witness to all who observe, and at the same time being prepared for His kingdom. He wants us to have a passionate love for goodness, so in your mind give Him a unique place. Do not fear the enemy, as we would Christ. Use your hope to think about Him, His power, His justice, wisdom, goodness, truth, omnipotence and omniscience.

Remember always that He has wisdom without error, power without limit, love without hatred. Our hope is in One who is great in every respect. Quit thinking of God in fleshly terms. God is not a very limited man, nor is He simply a superman. He is GOD! He is with us, and so who can permanently harm us? Concentrate on being completely devoted to God, and if we do this we have every reason to hope. God is not a man that He should lie. His promises are sure.