

## PATIENT ENDURANCE

Good morning, brothers and sisters. You heard Ray last night express his gratitude for the prayers he has been getting. I also want to say thank you. I have never been prayed for so much in my whole life. I was thinking: what if I could get this every day? That would be pretty nice. Thank you.

I am Jeremy. I am from a suburb of San Francisco that is called Concord, California. Back in February, John asked me if I would be willing to share on this practical outworking of endurance. He said it would be nice to hear from a younger brother. Well, I'm pretty nervous right now, but I just turned forty, so I'm hoping that if things go well today I might get promoted to the status of middle-aged brother. It's a stretch.

When given the opportunity to speak, I like to occasionally share on: this day in church history. What happened on this date in church history? A lot of things, but I will talk briefly about William Booth. He grew up poor. He was only educated until he was thirteen, but God put in him a heart for the outcasts in England. He was a Methodist, but he was unconventional, which doesn't fit with Methodism. It put him on the outs with a lot of the clergy. This is a quote from an article in *Christian History Magazine*:

*One evening, in 1865, William Booth left his West London lodgings and walked along Mile End Waste, a one and a half mile stretch of shows, shooting ranges, petty dealers, and quack doctors. Outside the Blind Beggar Pub, he listened to some street evangelists. When they had finished, he was invited to speak and found it an invigorating challenge. At midnight, he returned home and told his wife Catherine, "Catherine, darling, I have found my destiny."*

Booth decided to hold a series of evangelistic meetings in the same crime-ridden neighborhood, but rather than using a church building, he rented a tent and set it up in an old Quaker graveyard in East London. So on this day, July 5, 1865, William and Catherine Booth founded the Christian Mission in East London. A few years later, the Christian Mission changed its name and became the Salvation Army. One statistic says that between the years of 1881-1885 alone, just four years, an estimated 250,000 people came to know Lord as a result of their ministry. And I like this and maybe we will talk about it a little bit later, the power that light has to restrain darkness. Charles Spurgeon once said, "If the Salvation Army were wiped out of London, 5,000 extra policemen could not fill its place in the repression of crime and disorder."

The theme verse of the conference is Hebrews 10:36: "You have need of endurance." Then, it follows with: God takes no pleasure in those who shrink back. What follows is a list of people who did not shrink back. That is Hebrews chapter 11. Then, chapter 12 says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us ..." All these people you have to look back on and I wonder: that is what the author of the Hebrews said 1900 years ago. He was saying look at all these witnesses, look at all these people who have gone before us. If the believers then were surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, what about now? At the end of Hebrews 11, he said that he would run out of time if he tried to remind you of all the incredible brothers and sisters that have gone before us who have carried the torch. If that was true 1900 years ago, how about now? We are indeed surrounded by a great cloud of

witnesses today, a great cloud of witnesses, I think, far greater than the writer of Hebrews ever imagined. This is wonderful! So, praise God for people like William and Catherine Booth, who considered the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of this world for they were looking for a reward.

Let's have a word of prayer:

*We are so glad Lord that You are gracious, that You are compassionate, that You don't tire of speaking, even to a people who are often slow to hear. We are indeed surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. And like them, we ask by your Holy Spirit that You might grant that we too may run this race with endurance. Today, please give us the ability to hear what is on Your heart. If You are for us, who can be against us? Amen.*

Hebrews 10:36, which you all have memorized: *"For you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what was promised."*

*II Corinthians 4:16-18: Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

*I John 3:2: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is."*

*Matthew 25:21: "His master said to him, 'Well done good and faithful slave. You have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'"*

Finally, a verse that I am going to use to frame what I have on my heart this morning is I Thessalonians 1:2-3: *"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God the Father."* So, we have those three phrases: work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope.

In addition to these verses, I think it is good that we have a common working definition for what is endurance. It has already been shared on a lot. Oftentimes endurance is translated as *patience* or *patiently endure, steadfastness*. But it is more than what we think of as just patient. Like, I can tolerate this thing just a little bit longer; I'm being patient. It is an antonym of weariness and shrinking back. We see it juxtaposed to shrinking back. One definition I found says: "patient endurance is the temper which does not succumb under suffering." It is a temper. It is controlling yourself by the Holy Spirit and not succumbing under suffering. It carries with it I think the connotation of going through a difficult time but not just surviving. It is going through a difficult time victoriously. *Overcoming* is a word that we use. Also, another word we see used in the Scripture that I think fits this is this word *abounding*. It is not just surviving, it is abounding. Last night, Ray talked about running through first base. Not falling and just barely making it, reaching and barely touching first, but you are getting through it.

I have been asked to talk about practical application as a matter of endurance. I am a younger brother. When you think about enduring you think of somebody 70, 80, 90, 102, they can talk about enduring. I do have a couple of decades. My disclaimer is always I am never speaking from a position of “I have attained, I have arrived, I have got some place,” but like Paul said, “I have not, but I press on.” I press on with you brothers and sisters, we press on.

The three things I want to talk to you about that to me relate to enduring, sort of disconnected points, but to me they connect in my mind, so God have mercy on you guys.

### **The Work of Faith**

In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 is this phrase “work of faith.” I want to look at the perspective of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes. The second thing I want to consider is this matter of legacy in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, “labor of love.” Then finally, I want us to see what is necessary for one who successfully endures and consider the phrase, again from 1 Thessalonians 1:3, “steadfastness of hope.”

In the last few months I have been considering the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a challenging book, for me anyhow. The Lord has given me some help in understanding this book which has been challenging, encouraging, so I want to lay a little groundwork for the book of Ecclesiastes.

Who wrote the book? Good answer, Solomon wrote the book. There are many who like to maintain that Solomon did not for various reasons, people whose brains have gotten too big. There is some internal evidence that Solomon wrote it. I’ll tell you why I think he wrote it and then, why it is very important that *he* wrote it.

If you look at Ecclesiastes 1:1 it says, “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” The author does not identify himself by name but as the Preacher who was the son of David, king in Jerusalem. David had many sons and grandchildren, right? But not all of them were king in Jerusalem.

Ecclesiastes 1:12: “I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.” Again, David had many sons and so did Solomon, but only Solomon was king over a unified Israel in Jerusalem. So we know that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes.

Also, in chapter 2:4-9: “I enlarged my works; I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves and I had home-born slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.”

1 Kings 4 and 1 Kings 10 says that Solomon was richer and wiser than any man, all the kings of the earth. So, Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes.

### **Solomon’s Perspective**

Here’s why this matters. Solomon had credentials. My students would say, “Solomon has got ‘street cred.’ When he says something, you can believe him.” If I said to you, “Brothers

and sisters, money is never going to satisfy you; all the riches will never satisfy you.” You could say, “What do you know, brother, you only have \$50 in your savings account.” It is a good point.

If you confided in me that you were having marriage trouble, and you said, “Sometimes I wonder if a new wife would be the solution,” and I said, “No, Brother, that is not the problem.” Well, what do I know? But if the man had three hundred wives and you came and told him and he said, “No, that’s not the issue,” maybe you would believe him. Solomon has credentials for what he is going to say.

Have you ever considered that in the book of Ecclesiastes it seems like there are some statements that are not true? This is what was very challenging to me. There are a lot, but I will just point to a few of them.

Ecclesiastes 1:11: “There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the latter things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who come later still.” The author is saying, “Your life is worthless. Nothing is going to be remembered. Nothing you do is going to be remembered. Who you are is not going to be remembered.” Is that a true statement?

Ecclesiastes 2:11: “Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.” He is saying, “All that you work for, all of your labor, all of your accomplishments are worthless, are nothing.” Is that true that there is no profit in hard work and diligent labor?

The next section says that there is no difference between the wise man and the fool for they both die and the same fate befalls them both. Is that true? It says working hard is a waste. One guy works hard and it comes to nothing. Another guy is lazy and gets lucky and rich, so it’s all a waste. Is that true?

Ecclesiastes 2:24: “There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good.” Just have a good time and pat yourself on the back and say, “That’s good enough.” is that true?

Ecclesiastes 4:1-3: “Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.” Is that true? Is it better to be dead, better that you not even be born? That doesn’t sound right, but it is God’s word, so it is true. How is it true? What is Solomon talking about?

If you have looked at the book, you know that there is a phrase that appears a lot. This phrase “vanity of vanities” appears in thirty verses. Another word for vanity is *futility* or *worthless*. Again and again, worthless, vanity, futility. It is all a waste.

Is everything we do a waste? He says, “All is vanity.” What is the “all” he is referring to? There is another phrase in Ecclesiastes that appears almost as frequently and this is what has helped me. This phrase appears in 27 verses and it is the phrase “under the sun.” Over and

over, Solomon says it is a waste, it is vanity, it is futility—under the sun. All this work, all this labor under the sun, is coming to nothing.

### **The Perspective of Copernicus**

In the early 1500s, there was an astronomer named Copernicus. This astronomer was a mathematician as well. He made some propositions that were very controversial at the time. He said that the planets go around the sun. The sun is in the center of the solar system and the planets go around that. Wow! This was controversial; people got very upset. All of Copernicus's works were burned, condemned by the church. Other mathematicians, like Galileo, who stood up for him were put on house arrest for the rest of their lives just for defending the man. What is the big deal? It has to do with the matter of perspective.

The scientists and the church of the day, looked up, like we do and they saw the sun move through the sky. It does. It looks like the stars move as well. When I look up in the wintertime I see certain constellations and the Big Dipper. When I look in the summer, it is not the same. The winter and the summer are different. It looks like it is moving. The scientists had maps; the scientists had charts. They had their mathematical proof that the earth was in the center. When Copernicus came at them with this different perspective, with a different idea, it was an affront. It was very challenging; it was called heresy.

But what if we pull way, way, way back and look at the solar system and space from a different perspective? Well, if we pull way back, then all the maps are wrong. All the charts are wrong. All the science is all upside down and wrong. It turns out there is something way beyond the physical realm. There is something way beyond what we can see. There is something way beyond the sun. All those seemingly erroneous statements are true from the perspective of under the sun.

### **Beyond the Visible Realm**

But is that all there is? We know there is something way beyond the visible realm. And way beyond the visible realm is what we see when we have the eyes of our heart enlightened. So the phrase from I Thessalonians 1:3 that frames this part is “the work of faith.” Does our life here have no purpose? No. By faith we see that we have been created with a purpose. In Christ Jesus we have been created with a purpose. Are all of our works of no lasting value as it says in Ecclesiastes? No. We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works. It is by the gift of faith that we labor, that we strive, not for what is under the sun but because we believe our work done in faith here, right now, counts for eternity.

There is a book entitled, *Secular Work is Full Time Service*. Sometimes in our mentality, we get the idea that there is clergy and there is laity. These are the workers, these are the responsible brothers and sisters and this is everybody else. I am just a truck driver, a schoolteacher, or whatever. Is there such a thing as secular work if we are in God's kingdom? Everything, all of our work that is done in faith, counts for the kingdom. And so, like James, might we all learn to say, “I will show you my faith by my works.” It is a work of faith.

What gives endurance the ability to patiently endure difficult situations is the faith that there is something way beyond the physical sun, way beyond what we can see. Paul encouraged the Colossians believers to set their minds on things above not on earthly things. How do we endure? Second Corinthians 4:16, the verse we opened with also says the same

thing. “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Solomon, it says, was the richest and wisest man ever under the sun. But Someone greater than Solomon is here.

The work of faith is first that gift that enlightens our eyes and our hearts and it comes by hearing God’s Word. Secondly, the work of faith is that work that we do by faith on earth that we believe counts for eternity. We are able to endure when faith enables us to see what is beyond the sun, like Moses seeing Him who is unseen.

### **Your Labor of Love**

I will try to transition to the second point that I have in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, “your labor of love.” The second idea I want to consider is this matter of legacy. When I say legacy, I mean, how will you be remembered?

I am a high school teacher. One of the classes I teach is called career transitions. It is a mandatory elective, which is an oxymoron, I understand, but some of the students get to take my class. I teach them practical skills. We look at personality profile tests. We do skills tests to see what they might be good at and then the results of these tests give them career clusters that they might be interested in pursuing. After we do that we do job applications and resumes. It’s fun.

But I have this one lesson and it has to do with death. I do it at the beginning of the year and this is how I start the lesson. I tell them, “You all are going to die. All of you, you are all going to die.” And they freak out. They panic. I’m not kidding; they panic. “What are you talking about Mr. Eklund? What do you mean? You don’t know that for sure.” Every year a couple of students will say, “You don’t know that for sure.”

“Yes, I do know that for sure.” I could tell them, “Unless Christ comes first,” but it is a public school, and I need a job. So, I just say, “It’s true. You are all going to die.” It is honestly as if they had never considered it. But after they panic, they get real quiet because eternity is in their hearts. And I hope that talking about something real settles them just a little bit.

What is the point of the lesson? The point of the lesson is to have them write their epitaphs. How do you want to be remembered? We draw a little headstone and I let them put their name on it, but I don’t let them put an end date. Then, I let them put a slogan. How are you going to be remembered? Because you are all going to be remembered. They study for exams and that is not fun. They crunch for the SATs and that’s hard. They practice hard in sports because they want to get better. They regularly endure difficult situations to achieve a desired goal. So I ask them to consider the final result—what about the end goal. For most of these students, they are young people, they do not even think about their end when they are that young.

So, how do you want to be remembered? The idea is that maybe having this goal way down the road could be something like a coach or a guide for you. It is something to remind you as you live your daily life, as you are studying at high school, as you are going to college, or whatever: how do you want to be remembered? The workbook has some examples. Some are kind of silly: Robert Davis says, “The best cook in Chicago.” Lucy Barton: “Proud owner of 120 pairs of shoes.” Sarita Patel: “She gave it her best shot.” Al Gore: “Creator of the

internet.” (It didn’t really say that.)

### **What is Your Legacy?**

I thought about, how I would be remembered. I like coffee a lot. So, I was thinking, what if at the end, some people said, “Jeremy, he really knew a lot about coffee.” How lame does that sound? I do not want to be known for my coffee expertise. Will you be remembered for the clothes you wore? Will you be remembered for your culinary savvy? Will you be remembered for your social media activity? Will you be remembered for your music collection? Maybe these things seem negative, but not necessarily. Will you be remembered for your service to others? Will you be remembered for your Sunday school lessons? Will you be remembered for the mission organizations you supported? Will you be remembered for your generosity?

We have this lesson because perhaps having an end in mind might direct our lives a little bit now. If you are stingy now, no one is going to remember you for your generosity. If this is a goal, all right; it’s going to direct my life a little bit today. But this is from an earthly perspective. That is as far as I can go because it is a public school classroom.

What about the heavenly perspective? Are there epitaphs in the Bible? Actually, there are a lot in Hebrews 11. Imagine this headstone: Abel—he offered a better sacrifice, Enoch—pleasing to God, Noah—heir of righteousness. Abraham—called God’s friend; Moses—the most humble man on the face of the earth. It is a fact that how we live our lives, how we number our days, matters. It will affect how we are remembered on earth, but that is temporal. It will affect us in heaven as well.

I recently got to listen to brother T. Austin-Sparks’ memorial service. (It is on the Christian Testimony Ministry website.) I do not know the man’s name that was officiating the service, but he said something that was very challenging to me. He asked a rhetorical question: “Was T. Austin-Sparks life a success? Was he successful?” Then he said, “If spiritual success means to communicate something more of the wonder, the glory, the power, and purpose of Christ, then our brother’s life was a success. If the result of his ministry was that others had a fuller and deeper knowledge of Christ, could any of us wish for more than that? That as a result of our lives others had a fuller and deeper knowledge of Christ?”

How will we be remembered? How will you be remembered? What are you laboring for and striving after? This passage in Thessalonians talks about a labor of love. Do we labor to be someone who sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Proverbs says a wise man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children. Our brother Stephen has been talking about Hudson Taylor’s great-grandfather. Did he leave a big monetary inheritance for many generations? No, but what he gave was generations, and generations, and generations of a very rich inheritance that far exceeds and far outweighs any natural inheritance that he could have passed down.

Do we labor to be remembered as someone whose zeal for the Lord’s house consumed them? Will we be remembered, as it says of those listed in Hebrews 11, and I would suggest, many thousands since, to be men and women of whom the world is not worthy? I think having a goal can help us stay the course. What gives endurance is having a goal. Now, I am talking about having a goal with a lower case “g” of how you want to be remembered. Paul

made reference to athletes training, beating their bodies into subjection to achieve a goal, that they might receive a prize. Some people may frown on prizes, like wanting a prize is carnal. But if rewards are given to those who please the Master, then count me in.

### **Paul's Admonition**

Paul talks about competition and athletes training and then he says, "Suffer hardship with me." Has anyone ever invited you to do that? You know, "Brother, Sister, let's go suffer." Paul said, "Suffer hardship with me." Why? Why would I want to go through a difficult situation with you, Paul? "So that we may please the One who enlisted us." Pleasing the Lord was Paul's aim. Pleasing Him, serving Him is our labor of love. We love because He first loved us. We love Him and labor for Him, but what is our labor? It is to offer our bodies, right? "Offer your bodies a living sacrifice, which is only your reasonable service."

We serve His body. If we are married, we serve our wives or husbands. We serve our children. We serve our co-workers. We serve our brothers and sisters. I will conclude this second point by saying that I think it would behoove us to consider our legacy as how we want to be remembered and to let the objective goal with the lower case "g" help to direct our steps.

II Corinthians 4:17: "for momentary, light affliction." I do not know what you are going through, but I am sure it does not seem momentary and light. But the encouragement is that it is working an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

What do you want on your gravestone? "Like Jesus." That would be pretty wonderful. How can that goal be realistic? How can we be transformed into His image? Again, I think it is a theme verse from the conference. "Seeing Him who is unseen."

One of the verses from I John that I opened with: "Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is."

We know this is one day, but every day, today as we see Him, we endure. As we see Him, we are conformed more and more into His likeness. We see His labor of love and our life becomes a labor of love as well.

### **The Endurance of Hope**

Then, the final thought, the final point I have is the final phrase in I Thessalonians 1:3, "endurance of hope." Paul praises the believers in Thessalonica saying that he is constantly bearing in mind their work of faith, their labor of love and their steadfastness of hope. The word *steadfastness* here is the same as endurance: the endurance of hope, the steadfastness of hope.

I do not know if you have asked the question "why?" Why do we have need of endurance? Why does the Lord speak so much of endurance in the New Testament? Why does He speak much of the opposite which is weariness? "Do not grow weary ... do not grow weary." He would not say over and over "do not grow weary" if weariness were not an option. Why did the Lord put in the hearts of the conference planners to have this word for us this year? Why did the Lord have this verse for us this year, "You have need of endurance"? It is because He knows what is coming, and He wants us to be ready and not grow weary.

Endurance or steadfastness of hope is necessary only because the world that we are living in is hopeless. When I say it is hopeless, we know the world is lost; it is without hope. But it is becoming increasingly hopeless, and I think even recognized as such.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. I want to read a couple of “hope” verses. Jesus had hope when He set His face toward Jerusalem. It says, “for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” There was hope. There are over fifty “hope” verses in the New Testament. So, if you are ever in need of a pick-me-up, get out your concordance and look up “hope.” It is encouraging.

### **“Hope” Verses**

Acts 23:6 (New Living Translation): Paul says, “I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead.” Later on he is going to say it is because of the hope of Israel.

Romans 4:18: (Romans has a lot about hope in it, actually.) “In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’” Abraham is called a man of faith, but Abraham was also a man of hope. Again, from the New Living Translation: “Even when there was no reason to hope, Abraham kept hoping.” The father of Faith was the father of Hope.

Romans 8:24-25: “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance (same word) we wait eagerly for it.”

Romans 15:13: “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 15:19: “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

If there is nothing beyond this life to hope in, then we are miserable. And I think the Preacher in Ecclesiastes would totally agree with that.

How did Paul pray for the churches? Ephesians 1:18: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling.”

The world is without hope. I have little kids—eleven, nine, and three. There are children’s movies and there are different things that come in different generations. You see things differently as an adult than as a child. I do not know what the themes were of movies in years past. But, recently we watched this movie called, *Moana*. It is a little kids’ movie, but it has this scene at the end of the movie and I thought, “I have seen that scene before.” At the end of the movie, death is creeping over the earth. Death is touching everybody; everything is dying. In the end, evil gets conquered. Then new life comes and spreads and takes over the whole earth.

That is not an original ending. That keeps happening. Where do I see that? Well, I see it in all my kids’ movies. *Frozen*: Ice has taken over the whole world and all of a sudden green and new life comes at the very, very end. *Wall-E*: Earth is a waste place, and eventually new life comes and green and health spread over the whole globe. *The Lorax*: Again, the hope, the goal is that a new life comes and real life comes and takes over the whole earth once again. At the end of *The Lord of the Rings* it is the same thing. Death has taken over, but then at the end there is victory and new life comes and green comes and takes over the whole planet.

What is it in these movie writers and producers that is causing them also to long for a new heaven and a new earth? Eternity is in their hearts, and these are in children's movies. Even little kids are longing for something more, something new. There has got to be something better. There is something bigger and better and beyond what is in front of me. They are looking out and they watch the news. They see the headlines. They see how their parents are reacting to the headlines. And kids are shaken up and they are feeling hopeless. Is there no purpose?

### **The World Needs Hope**

The National Institute of Mental Health recently released a report on suicide rates. I only bring it up because there is no better statistic for hopelessness. How do you measure hopelessness? This was a study that covered the years 1999-2015. Probably no surprise, but in every single age bracket, the numbers are going up, not just the numbers because the population is going up. The percentages are going up. The two biggest age brackets, interestingly enough, as far as percentage increases, are girls ages 10-14 and men aged 50-65. I am not a psychologist and I'm not going to try to explain why that is. I have ideas. The world needs hope. Our co-workers need hope. Our students need hope. Our neighbors need hope. Our children, and this is becoming increasingly burdensome to me, need hope.

I once read a church history book called *The Torch of the Testimony*. It has the idea of passing the baton from one generation to the next and it is a fine book. But, I am going to use the phrase, "the torch of the testimony" to mean something a little different right now. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I use the words "light of the world?" Sunday school answer: "It's Jesus. Jesus is the answer." Yes, Jesus is always the answer. But Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. Let your light shine." I am going to suggest that this light, this torch is a torch of hope that we believers are supposed to hold. There is light; there is hope. But what if we, who have this hope as an anchor, lose hope? What if we despair? What if we, who have the hope, become hopeless? This is definitely a real possibility. In the last days, the love of many will grow cold. We need to recognize that this is a potential that we too could become hopeless.

If my treasures are laid up in heaven, there my heart will be also. If my treasures are on earth, and moth and rust start to destroy, if I lose my job, my home, my friends, my children, then I am shaken. In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul talks about lawlessness. It is increasing and finally the lawless one will be revealed. Right now, there is something restraining him, restraining this lawlessness, this man of lawlessness. The world is becoming increasingly dark. What restrains darkness? Light. It is simple. Light restrains darkness. I think this is what Spurgeon was talking about when he said, "If the Salvation Army were removed from East London, 5,000 policeman could not do the job that they are doing in restraining vice and disorder and other things." It is because light restrains darkness.

If you look at the two books, First and Second Thessalonians, they were written very close to each other and there is a difference that I would like to point out. Look in I Thessalonians 1:3, the frame verse: "Constantly bearing in mind your work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father." Work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.

Look at the beginning of II Thessalonians in 1:3 and it is similar: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.” That sounds very nice too. What is missing? Hope. He does not mention hope in II Thessalonians.

What happened? Between the two letters the persecution was unrelenting, and it was very difficult for the brothers and sisters who lived in Thessalonica. False teaching and heresy had come in and the brothers and sisters were shaken. He said, “I write to you so that you are not so easily shaken. Don’t be so quickly shaken.” What happened is that they lost their hope.

The work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope are in the first letter and in the second one there is no mention of hope.

### **Steadfastness and Hope**

Why is steadfastness necessarily linked with hope? It is because Hebrews 12:26-27 is coming. These verses have already been referenced, but I will just read it. “At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.’ The words once more indicate what can be shaken, that is created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.”

The Lord knows what is coming. He is mindful of us, of our weaknesses and He is doing what He can to prepare us by telling us ahead of time and by giving us the Holy Spirit.

Ten years ago, summer 2007, Dana was sharing at WCC in Santa Barbara with our brother, Lance. I think it was Dana who used this verse about a great shaking coming and why the Lord would shake, and how He would use it to purify us and make us vessels of honor. I remember being really touched by the message and I think a lot of people were. So, we prayed: “Lord, please shake us.” Lance used to say be very careful of what you pray for because the Lord loves those prayers and He will take them seriously. “Lord, please shake that we might be pure,” and so the Lord shook. I forgot about all those crazy prayers and all of a sudden, I started asking myself: “What is going on?” I withdrew my application for grad school, I had no job and I am moving into my parents’ house. The housing market crashed and people in the whole district were getting pink slips. Teachers who had been teaching for five years were getting pink slips. There was general panic everywhere. We were struggling at home, my wife and I struggling to be one. All of a sudden we were in marriage counseling, and we said, “Lord, what is going on?” “Remember that prayer?”

The Lord is so good, He is so gracious and so compassionate and He never gives us beyond what we can handle. The Lord knows that we need steadfastness in hope. Steadfastness is strong. The only thing that is not shakable is the house that is built upon the rock. Everything else is going to shake so that all that can be shaken will be taken away. Isn’t that wonderful?

Parents, this is me preaching to myself. If the parents are hoping in this life or if the parents here are despairing, growing weary, shrinking back, do you think our kids are going to believe the message that we speak? I am convicted by a quote from a non-Christian actually, Ralph Waldo Emerson, from the nineteenth century. “Don’t speak,” he said, “who you are thunders so loudly that I cannot hear what you have to say.” Don’t speak. “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” I think maybe St. Francis of Assisi said that.

My children hear me talk a lot, but how I am living before them is my testimony, *is* what they are reading, *is* what they are seeing and what they are hearing. If I say, “I am looking forward to heaven and it is all about living with the Lord and eternity and Jesus coming back,” but I am totally panicking and losing it because of my situation at work. I am popping off and yelling at them and telling them, “You need more self-control.” There is no testimony. There is no life.

Faith, love, and hope are nothing more than empty words if there are no accompanying actions, especially to our children first, then our co-workers, our neighbors, the world around us. These things—faith, love, hope are the visible evidence of whether we really believe what we say we believe or not. Ray touched on this last night: “When a co-worker asks how we are and we say, ‘Great,’ then they think, “Whoa, that is weird.”

Do we have this hope that is an anchor for us that every day there is hope? I will conclude with this. It is not an individual message. It is a corporate message because if we know what is on the Lord’s heart, it is the body, it is the Bride. God is not looking for trophies to put on a shelf. There is an individual work that needs to be done in all of our hearts and then we see His heart, and it is for a body. It is so we can stand with and encourage and support our brothers and sisters. I Thessalonians talks a lot about the Lord’s return. At the end of every chapter, it talks about the Lord’s return. He is going to return.

Why does Paul do that? In I Thessalonians 4:13, he says, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.” Then in 4:18, he talks about the rapture. He talks about the second coming of the Lord and the rapture. Why is Paul teaching us about the rapture? Is it so that we have our eschatology all lined up? No. “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” Encourage one another with what words? Jesus is coming back and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him—work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. Christ is why we live and work now. *Loved by Christ* is how I want to be remembered, and hearing one day from Christ, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” is what I hope to hear.

Let’s close in prayer:

*Thank you, Father, for Your Son by whom we have been fully accepted in the Beloved. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your intercessory ministry. And thank you, Holy Spirit, for speaking to our hearts and transforming our lives. We do pray for a powerful and transforming work by your Spirit to be done, an enduring work to be done in all of us that we will be the generation that welcomes back the King. If you tarry Lord, that we might be part of that great cloud of witnesses for future generations. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.*