

Hope (3)

Living That Hope

I John 3:1-3: “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

Luke 1:34-38: “And Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the Holy Offspring shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative, Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to Your Word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

John 14:16-18: “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

II Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

Let's pray: “Heavenly Father, how glorious You are! How wonderful it is to know that we have been brought to You through Jesus Christ. And here we are, our Father, before You wanting, desiring You to speak to us. Lord, only You can reveal the things that are on Your heart, the things You really want us to know; only You are able to do that. So we lay this hour before You and ask that You would speak to us, speak to us through Your Holy Spirit, through Your Word and show us, Lord, the things that You have done for us, the things that You want for us, the things that You have made possible for us in Jesus Christ. We give You this time. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This is the third and last time of speaking on hope. The first time we looked at what the hope of a Christian is; what is our hope as Christians? Last time we considered our hope as being something that is sure and that which has been secured for us. Today, we want to look at living that hope. We have this hope before us, but how does it pan out for us? How does this hope become sight? Hope is something we see in the far off, but it does not mean that we never reach it. It is not a carrot on a stick; it is a reality which has been promised to us by a God Who cannot lie because of who He is.

So the first Scripture I read tells us of what that hope is. Our hope is that we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. That is our hope. It is not just that we are saved from our sins; it is that the whole work is done, and we become like John said, “We are not just children of God but sons of God.”

And the second Scripture that we have is a dilemma concerning this hope. This hope is put plainly before us, and it brings us to a dilemma.

The third Scripture that we have is God's answer to this dilemma.

We have looked at hope twice now, and today we stand before that hope that we have been given. How do I react to the hope that has been set before me? At first glance, and the obvious answer is that I rejoice. Hallelujah, what a hope! What a wonderful thing! It is like last time when I talked about going to Holly Pavilion and saw those UCLA Bruins practicing, and saying, "This is us!" What a wonderful thing it was to realize in my heart that this is what we are supposed to be. This is wonderful! Then you have the whole season before you, and all of a sudden you might have a different point of view. And more often than not when we think of things, especially Christian things, spiritual things, we rejoice, we claim them, but then we say, "How do these things get done?" Or we look at ourselves and say, "I do not see it."

Nothing is Impossible with God

That is what we find with Mary when she was told that she was going to have the Christ. What a wonderful message! You are going to bear the Christ Child! Then she said to the angel after he had said, "God has chosen you for this very thing." And we can say the same thing, that God has chosen us to reflect His Son, but not just to reflect Him but to be formed into His image which is much more than reflecting His Son.

"God has chosen you, Mary, and her response was, "How can this be?" I think for a lot of us, and I know for me, when you look at what God has placed before you, you say, "How can this be?" I have been a Christian for fifty years, and I remember how joyous it was at first, but when I started realizing it, there was something amiss, and it was not with God. There is something amiss with me; not in the things that I do but in who I am; there is something amiss. How can this be so?

Mary was a virgin; and she said, "How can I have a child without having known man? That is an impossibility." Yet the angel gave an answer to her inquiry. He did not say, "You will figure it out; good luck to you. Oh, wait, here is a book you can read; this will help you." He did not do anything like that, but he answered her inquiry: "The Spirit of God will overshadow you." He led her to the Holy Spirit. This is heaven's answers to man's limitations. We have limits as fallen men, but God has an answer to our limitations. Better yet, it is not just our limitations but our extremities. Our limitations say, "We are limited; we can only go so far." Our extremities mean, "I am going to expand my box, and I am going to go as far as I can." When we do that, as we get out beyond ourselves, we get to the place of saying, "Even that does not go far enough. Even that cannot get it done. Even that cannot bring to pass what God has promised me." Of course, it was never meant to bring to pass what God has promised you.

There is nothing impossible with God. There is a better rendition of this in the Old Testament. When the three angels came to visit Abraham and told him that Sarah was going to have a child, Sarah laughed. The Lord said to Sarah, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" We look at it as impossible, and that is our mind frame—it is impossible. But when our eyes are set on God, is anything too wonderful for Him to do?! So that is His answer to us, "Is anything too wonderful?"

And upon this word given by the angel Mary responded, and her response was, “Let it be done to me according to Thy Word.” With these words she gave herself to God and said, “Lord, You have said that I have been chosen for this very purpose; I give myself to You that these things might be done.” That is the whole key to our hope. Our hope is not for us to try to fulfill; our hope is to say, “Lord, what a wonderful hope You have given me.” Nevertheless, when I look at myself and say, “How can these things be done?” He turns again and says, “I have a way; I am going to give you my Spirit.” And these are the very words, the very prayers that open the door to God to fulfill His purpose and His will in His servants, in His children. In His answer God took the focus totally off Mary. She did not have to worry about how this was going to be done; God took the focus upon Himself—by My Spirit. That is where the focus is, totally off myself, totally off Mary.

Now it is a wonderful picture when we look at the Holy Spirit which is God’s answer to our dilemma. In a sense, it is like reading Romans 7, and I used to hate this because you get to the point of Paul saying, “The good that I want to do, I do not do; the bad that I do not want to do, I do. Who can save me from the body of this death?” Now I am agreeing with that all the way, but this part really stuck in my craw; it was a bur in my saddle. “But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ!” What kind of answer is that? Shouldn’t He be telling us to do something? “If you do these things, that is how you get rid of the body of this death. Just give me the five things; give me the list. I will do them!” But He does not do that. He leaves us with this: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ,” because that is the answer. It is through Jesus Christ; It is only through Jesus Christ. It is nothing that you do; it is how you respond to Him, how you respond to the life that He has put in you. It is a wonderful picture of the love of Christ for His own in the giving of His Holy Spirit. He said, “I will not leave you as orphans.” You know, the orphan is not just a person whose parents have died or given them up, and because of that situation the orphan has no one to provide for him, for the needs that he has. Who is going to look after him? Who is going to give him the things that he needs? There is no one there. So the Lord Jesus said, “I am not going to leave you that way; I am not going to leave you unprovided for. And my provision for you is the Holy Spirit; I am giving you the Holy Spirit. I will ask of My Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He might be with you forever.” It is not until you are past teenage, not until you have gotten settled in a church, not until you have had a wife and kids, not until you have retired, but *forever*. This is the provision for us; we are provided forever.

I am reading slowly a biography on George Mueller, and the orphans could only be in his orphanage so long. He trained them with the skills and things of that nature, educated them in basic education so that they could make it on their own when they reached the age when they could no longer be in the orphanage. It is not so with God. We always have the provision that He has because we are not orphans; we are His children and to be His sons.

The Holy Spirit Comes to Indwell Us

“I will ask the Father that He might give you another Helper that might be with you forever.” The Holy Spirit is sent to indwell us. The very Spirit of Christ was sent to indwell us, and He comes in to indwell our spirits, saying, “Behold, I have come. In the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O My God; and Your law is written in my heart” (Psalm 40:7-8). That is how the Spirit comes into us. I know that this is talking about Christ. Yes it is, but it is also speaking

of His Spirit who comes to indwell us because the same Spirit that was in Christ is now in us, and this is the Spirit that was in Christ.

His book was originally entitled “Divine Conquest,” but today it has been reprinted and is now called, “God’s Pursuit of Man.” I do not think it is the greatest title; I think “Divine Conquest” should have been kept.

A. W. Tozer speaks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the regenerated Christian or the born-again Christian, and he makes this point: “The Holy Spirit does not come to indwell our spirits as a disinterested guest, or even just as a guest.” How do you treat a guest? You treat them nicely, right? But he does not come as a guest, and especially a disinterested guest. He does not come to be a passenger in our lives. He does not come to be an observer of our lives, making a few suggestions here and there to help us out. No! He enters into our spirits with intent. There is something that He has come to do. He is not a passenger; He has not come just to say, “Hey, let’s just chill out, buddy. We will just kick back here on the couch.” He has not come just to sit around in our lives. He has come with an intent—to rule. He intends to come in to our lives to conquer and vanquish any and all things that stand in the way of us being conformed to the image of Christ. He comes like the angel of the Lord in Joshua 5:13-14 “Are You for or against us? He said, No, I am Commander of the Lord’s Army. I am neither for you nor against you; I am here to do God’s will.” My intent is that God’s will will be done in you and through you, and I have not come with less than that on My mind or on My heart. For My intent and My mission is to bring you all the way through to conformity to the image of Christ, and I will not move from that intent. That will always be My intent. He has come to lead me against the various cities in my life that need to be assailed and taken captive and come under His authority. He comes to wage war against sin, the lingering sin. We are getting into the beginning of Judges in the Bible study, and we find that they had not driven out the Canaanites; they had not taken the whole thing.

It is the same with us; we have lingering things that need to be driven out. The Holy Spirit has come to drive them out and to bring them into captivity. He has come to wage war against the flesh, our fleshly desires, fleshly ambitions. He has come against every high and lofty thought of the self, the world and the devil, that these thoughts would exalt themselves higher than the hope that God has given us. No, no, no, that is nothing compared to this.

It is like when Jesus was shown all the kingdoms of the world, and the devil said, “If You only bow down and worship me, these will all be yours, exalting those things above what he was meant to do. The Holy Spirit has come against these things. And not only against every high and lofty thought but against every low and lustful imagination of the flesh that would defile us and keep us forever in a place of inaction, of self-loathing and defeat. The Holy Spirit has come against these things. He is coming into our lives to remove them and put us on a higher plane, on higher ground. We are no longer in Adam but are now in the humanity of Christ because this is the will of God for us in Christ Jesus. He has come as the Commander who also leads us into the kingdom of God. And when I say He leads us into the kingdom of God, you say, “Well, I have been born again into the kingdom of God,” and that is true. But we also will find that His rule is increasing in us. And that is what I mean by leading us into the kingdom of God, leading us into that rule where God is ruling more and more and more in our lives.

The Kingdom of God

Let me put this as the definition of the kingdom of God. In Romans 14:17 it says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, not apart from the Holy Spirit's working in us, not righteousness apart from that which He is working into us, not peace apart from His working in us, not joy apart from His working and completing things in us.

Righteousness

When we talk about righteousness, we are not talking about acts that make us righteous. "Oh, if I do these things, I will become righteous." No! Because if we do these things, what do we present God? We have nothing but filthy rags; our righteousness is nothing like that. There is nothing that we can do that makes us righteous. We are made righteous in Christ. We have Christ's righteousness, not a righteousness of our own. But the righteousness that He is leading us into is the will of God which is a good definition of righteousness. What is righteousness? It is doing the will of God. In other words, I am doing His will; that is right, and that is good.

So this it is not just a grandiose righteousness; it is a righteousness in our daily lives. It is a righteousness that comes into the very minute things in our lives; how we act towards one another, how we talk, what we do, the good works that we do. Where do they come from? They come from the Spirit of God living and working in us; that is righteousness.

Peace

We think of peace as being: "I need some quiet around here." My wife and kids will tell you that peace to me is when I go to my chair of solitude. It is in another room, and no one comes in there; that is peace. But that is not the peace the Holy Spirit brings into us. It is not the absence of strife; it is not the absence of conflict; it is not the absence of noise. If it were, then Jesus Christ never had peace because His life was full of conflict and strife brought to him by those who were against Him. What we are talking about here is a harmony between God and us, and that is what the Lord Jesus Christ had; it was a harmony between Him and His Father. That is what kept Him; that was His peace.

In speaking about harmony, I do not mean like a singing harmony although that is a wonderful thing. But harmony with God comes through being in agreement with Him. A year or so ago, I gave a few messages on walking with God. One of the verses I used was Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together unless they are in agreement?"

The harmony that we have with God comes from being in agreement with Him, as we are walking through life in a personal relationship with Him. We begin to see Him pointing out things and saying, "That is sin," and we have to come into agreement with Him, and say, "Yes, that is sin." When we start arguing with Him and say, "No, You are going too far here, Lord. That is really nothing." We have to come into agreement; and that is where we get the peace with God, that is where we are in harmony with God. He talks to us, He shows us, He points things out in our lives: "You need to be going out more to other people. You need to be inviting people into your home. I want you to invite these people into your home." "But Lord, I do not know them."

We got invited to somebody's house this last week, and we hardly know them. We have seen them here in the fellowship, but it was a wonderful thing to be in harmony with the Lord. And the Lord said, "Go." I am a person who does not like to go to other people's homes; you cannot be yourself. You cannot take your shoes off, although when I was there, I did take my shoes off, and they were not offended.

But to have peace with God is when we are in harmony with God, and that is the peace that Jesus had with His Father. He was always at peace in the midst of conflict because He was in agreement with His Father. He never moved out of that agreement.

Joy

Joy is taking delight in something. I really delight in doing this. "I delight to do Thy will, O God. I take pleasure in doing Your will." To do the will of God was food for the Lord Jesus.

John chapter 4: "Has someone given Him food to eat?" And He said, "I have food that you know not of." "Someone brought You some food?" "No, my food is to do the will of God."

We are going to have a meal today. How many of you are looking forward to that? Probably you are looking forward to it even more than this time right now. You are looking forward to having some food and also having fellowship with some other people, delighting in it. That is what joy is; it is the delight in following the Lord, the delight in doing His will. That is the joy the Holy Spirit gives us. It is not a joy that the baseball season has begun; it is not joy that I am retired; it is joy because I am doing the will of God. I find myself in the center of the will of God. Oh, what joy that is! What delight that is! The Holy Spirit does not transform us in order that we might do the will of God. He does not fix us up and say, "Now you are ready to do the will of God." But He transforms us as we do the will of God.

In II Kings 5 there is the story of Naaman the leper who was a Syrian general. He went to raid the Northern Kingdom, and he captured a little Israeli girl. She told Naaman's wife that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him. He went there with all his entourage to see Elisha who was the prophet. But Elisha did not even go out to meet him. He just said to his servant, "Tell him to go and dip in the Jordan seven times, and he will be made clean." And Naaman said, "I am not going to do that. We have cleaner rivers in Syria; I am not going to do that." He was really upset, but he had a couple of servants who said, "If he had asked you to do something hard, you would have done it. Instead, he asked you to do this simple thing." He went down to the river and dipped seven times, and he was cleansed of his leprosy. He was transformed as he did the will of God. That is a big lesson we need to learn. This is what stops us from doing good works. "I cannot do it; I have to fix myself up first." And the Lord says, "No, go do it."

Another example, and this is probably one some of us older people know. You remember Corrie Ten Boom—the Hiding Place? Her sister died at Ravens Brook, the death camp. In 1947, two years after the war had ended, Corrie Ten Boom went to Germany to share the love of God and the forgiveness of God with the German people. As she was speaking, in the back of the room there was a guard from Ravens Brook, and she recognized him immediately. She gave a word on the forgiveness of God, and as she ended, the people

were going away, and this man made his way forward to her. I do not think he recognized her for he said to her, "You know, I did a lot of bad things when I was a guard at Ravens Brook. But after the war ended I was led to the Lord, and the Lord has forgiven me of all those things. Then he said, "Now I need to know that you have forgiven me." And she said, "All the time she was looking at him, she was thinking, I recognize him; I know what he did. What do I do?" And she responded very mechanically as if there was no feeling at all: "As he reached his hand out I forced myself to reach my hand to shake his, and the moment I touched his hand the love of God came flooding in to me." And she said this: "I forgive you, brother, with all my heart." We are not transformed in order to do these things; we are transformed as we do them. This is the Lord's way. Otherwise, we are never ready, not ever ready, but never ready. And as the Holy Spirit is leading us into the kingdom of God, we are proving to be His workmanship.

Michael Angelo's First Masterpiece

I am going to show the Pieta, Michael Angelo's first masterpiece at twenty-one years old, which took him two years. When I say that we are proving to be his workmanship, I want you to look at this wonderful piece of art and the intricacies that we see in this statue. For example, look at the details in the garment, the folds in it. Isn't that incredible!? The ankle bone, the relaxation of the body, the intricacies of the fingers, and the little pads, the sorrow in the face of his mother as she holds him, the folds in her garment are so intricate, just wonderful.

God's work in us is just as intricate and just as wonderful. It took him two years to paint this masterpiece; but the Lord says, "I am taking My time because this is my masterpiece that I am creating, and I will take as long as I need to." There is no time limit with Him because He is doing a great work. It is like Nehemiah: "We are doing a great work; I cannot come down."

So Michael Angelo had a number of tools that he would use to make this. He had different chisels and hammers to knock out rock, coarse papers, that we would call sand paper of different coarseness. We have that real coarse sand paper when we want to get really rough stuff, then we get a finer sand paper and begin to smooth it further. Then the next one we use is almost like an emery cloth and it makes it even smoother. Next comes the soft cloths to polish.

When Michael Angelo was looking for a piece of stone, if he could see what he wanted to make from the stone, he purchased it. He would look until he found the piece of stone that he could see in it what he could make. It was not that it was already in the stone, but he could see in it what he could make. "I can see what I want to do, and I know that I will be able to do it."

Now the Holy Spirit has His tools. He uses the Word of God in our lives, whether it is the study of the Word of God, memorizing it, the reading of the Word of God, whether it is the Word of God speaking to us through a ministry or through a brother or sister who is talking with us and using the Word of God. However, it suits Him, He uses His Word.

He uses our relationships with others. If we have an unforgiving spirit, He will find somebody that you need to forgive. Or He will use someone who will forgive you to change your heart and spirit. He uses assembly life, and we were talking about that when we did the Sunday night meetings, "Why We So Gather."

He uses life's circumstances and trials; He uses illness. He uses disappointment, He uses the love of the brethren for us. He uses our prayers. One of the biggest things I have been finding out in seeking to fix my prayer life is that as I pray for something, and I continue to pray that prayer overtime, I find all of a sudden that I am getting some light on it, and my whole heart changes about what I am praying for. And it comes to the place where the Lord gives me a prayer, and He says, "Our Father, who art in heaven, thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." It brings me to the place of saying, "I want to pray Your will; I want to see Your will for this; I want Your will to be done. I know that I have this thing in my life right now, and I want Your will to be done over it. He uses our prayer life; He molds it, and He changes it.

We are not always compliant with the work that He is doing in us. Oftentimes, we resist His working out His will in us. But you know, when we resist, He wrestles with us. There is a great hymn, 490 in the book, and I am not going to read it all because it is fourteen verses in Christ in Song, but the original was more like thirty. It was written by Charles Wesley about four years into his being a Christians. Originally, it was titled, "Wrestling Jacob," but here it is called, "Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown." This is a picture of his wrestling, and I am going to read a few verses.

Verse 1:

"Come, O Thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee,
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

Verse 2:

I need not tell Thee who I am,
(That is a great verse; I do not have to tell God who I am.)
My sin and misery declare,
Thyself hast called me by my name,
Look on Thy hands, and read it there,
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

Verse 7:

My strength is gone, my nature dies,
I sink beneath Thy weighty hand,
Faint to revive, and fall to rise,
I fall, and yet by faith I stand.
I stand and will not let Thee go
Till I Thy Name, Thy nature know.

Verse 12:

The Sun of righteousness on me

Hath ris'n with healing in His wings,
Withered my nature's strength, from Thee
My soul its life and succor brings.
My help is all laid up above,
Thy nature and Thy Name is Love.

Verse 14:

Lame as I am, I take the prey,
Hell, earth and sin, with ease o'er come,
I leap for joy, pursue my way,
And, as a bounding hart, I run,
Through all eternity to prove
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

The first time I heard this was when Lance used it when he brought messages on Jacob back in California in 1979. Through the Holy Spirit's perseverance in wrestling with us, His strength is wounding us. We find that His name is Love. He is the Love that never lets us go, the Love that conquers our soul. His wounding changes the way we walk, the way we live our lives, the way we view all things. No longer are we self-reliant, but we are forever leaning on a staff, and that staff for us is Christ Himself who is made known to us through the Holy Spirit and through our experience.

The Holy Spirit is God's seal upon us and sealed within us. That seal shows that He has put His claim on us. "I have redeemed you; you are Mine" (Isaiah 43:). He has written His name on us for others to read as we live before them walking by the light and the life of the Spirit indwelling us. They are the ones who ask us, "What is this hope that you have?" For they see that our lives are being transformed.

And this is the most wonderful thing of all; the Holy Spirit, like our hope, has been given to us by God. We do not have to earn it, we do not have to earn His indwelling, we do not have to do something to gain His indwelling; God has given Him to us as our Helper to indwell us forever. He has been given to us by God to dwell in us with intent, the intent that we will be like Christ and even share His glory. He has been sent that we might realize the hope that God has put in us. And since we have such a hope let's give ourselves to this Helper who is able to construct those highways to Zion in our hearts, who is able to bring us all the way to God before God, not in fear of punishment but in the hope of being those spirits of just men made perfect. Charles Wesley in another hymn (210) writes this:

Finish then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place;
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

This is the kind intention of God's will for us in Christ Jesus. To Him be glory forever more. What great things He has for us! What great things He has done for us, and what a great thing He has done in seeing to it that these things can be made complete through the Holy Spirit indwelling in us. What a great God we have who not only gives us hope, but gives us One to lead us through to the end of that hope, to endure to the end. May it be that we have that hope held onto tightly, and He has us tightly in His grasp also. Let's praise Him.

Our Father, You are so good and great and gracious to us. Who could have thought that God would want to do anything for those like us! There is no reason in the world, for our thoughts do not even raise to that height. However, Your thoughts are greater than our thoughts. Oh, Lord, how we thank You that is so. How we thank You that You do not only give us a hope, but You give us One to lead us all the way through to the end of that hope. Lord, we accept Him; we say, Lord, come boldly into our hearts afresh; fill us anew with Thy Spirit. Holy Spirit, come and do what You intend to do. We give You our lives. We, like Mary, say, "Here I am, Lord, let Your will be done." We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.