The Journey

Numbers 21:4
*And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way*

Intro
They Rejoiced.
- On the banks of the Red Sea,
  - the Bible says that they sang
    - and they danced.
- As they watched
  - the mighty waters of the Red Sea
  - close over Pharaoh’s army,
    - hope was born in their hearts.
- That was where they first dared
  - to believe the Lord
    - and his servant Moses.
- They realized,
  - in that moment when their oppressors were crushed
  - beneath those great walls of water,
    - that their greatest dream had become a reality.

They rejoiced, and they sang.
- They sang because they had witnessed
  - the mighty hand of God.
- They sang because they realized
  - that God had done for them
  - what they could never have done
    - for themselves.
- They sang because their day of salvation
  - had finally come.
- God had heard their cries
  - and delivered them
  - from their sorrows.
- And a song was born in their hearts,
  - a song of wonder
  - at God’s amazing grace.

They sang, and they danced.
- They danced
  - because they would never again
    - be subject to the taskmaster’s whip.
- They danced
The Pentecostals of Lake City

The Journey

Soon the echoes of the singing would fade away

• and the joy of the dancing would be forgotten
  o and these children of Abraham
    ▪ would come to terms with the fact
      • that this wasn’t just a field trip.

• This wasn’t just a short excursion into the wilderness.
  o The transition from bondage to blessing
    ▪ would be a long wearisome journey.

• Days would become weeks
  o and weeks would become years.

• Time would pass,
  o life would happen
    ▪ and singing and dancing

They sang,

• they danced
  o and they celebrated the deliverance of God.

• And, when the singing was over
  o and the dancing was finished,

• they turned their backs to the Red Sea,
  o they turned their backs on all of Egypt,
    ▪ and they set out on a journey.

• They had no idea how long the journey would last
  o or how far they would have to travel,

• they only knew that the same God
  o that had buried Pharaoh in the Red Sea
    ▪ had promised to bring them
      • to a land that flowed
      • with milk and honey.

• So, with the promise of Abraham's inheritance in their hearts,
  o they set out on the journey
    ▪ from prison to paradise.

• The only thing that stood between them
  o and the fulfillment of all of their hopes and dreams
    ▪ was... The Journey.

The Journey

Soon the echoes of the singing would fade away

• because their children
  ▪ would be born free.

• They danced
  o because never again
    ▪ would their infants be ripped from their grasp
      • and be fed to the crocodiles.

• They danced because 400 years of oppression
  o had finally come to an end.
The Pentecostals of Lake City

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The Journey

- would be replaced
  - by trials and troubles.
- Hardships would befall them
  - and enemies would rise against them.
- The burning sun would beat down upon them
  - and the hot dust of a desert wasteland
    - would scorch their parched throats.
- Their world would become completely encapsulated
  - in the journey.
- With the passage of time,
  - the journey would become their life.

Somewhere in the journey something died in their spirits.
- They lost their vital optimism.
  - Historian John Keegan
    - defines vital optimism
    - as that quality of spirit
      - where there is a persuasion
      - that the best is yet to come.
- It is that bedrock belief
  - that, no matter how bad today may be,
    - there will always be a better tomorrow.
- Somewhere in the wilderness
  - something devastating happened to their faith.
- Somewhere in the wilderness
  - hope was lost.
- The word of God records it this way,
  - in Numbers 21:4,
    - “And the soul of the people
      - was much discouraged
    - because of the way.”

Somewhere between Egypt and their promised land,
- their soul became discouraged
  - because of the journey!
- Somewhere in the midst of the hardships
  - of day-to-day living
    - they lost sight of their destination.
- Somewhere in the middle of the wilderness,
  - their songs of joy
    - were replaced with murmuring.
- Somewhere along the way
  - their visions of fields they did not plant
  - and homes they did not build
    - were obscured
• by the very present struggles
  • of the journey.

• The very journey
  • that began as the means of reaching their promise,
    • now became the obstacle
    • that would hinder them
      • from ever reaching their destination.
  • "because of the way!"

In the post analysis, it is plain to see.
• The Hebrews allowed the journey
  • to rob them of their hope.
    • The journey stole their promise from them.
• The journey obscured their ability
  • to see the mighty hand of God
    • at work in their midst.
• It was God’s provision that sustained them.
  • Yet, even though they never lacked for bread to eat,
    • they became disgusted
      • with the very bread of heaven
        • and complained about their lack of meat.
• The leather on the soles of their shoes
  • never wore out,
    • yet the journey so affected them
      • that they became discouraged
        • and dismayed.
• God made them springs of water
  • in dry and barren places,
    • but still yet they dared to accuse Moses
      • of bringing them into the wilderness to die.

Somewhere between the banks of the Red Sea
• and the mighty river Jordan
  • a whole generation lost out with God
    • because they became overwhelmed
      • by the journey.
• They allowed the journey
  • to cause them to forget
    • the mighty hand of God
      • that had crushed Pharaoh.
• They allowed the journey
  • to cause them to discount
• the promises of the One
  • that had already done so much for them.
• They allowed the wonder of the Promised Land
  o to become obscured in their minds
    • because of the trivial
      • heartaches and pains
        o of the journey.
• Somewhere along the way
  o they became so caught up
    • in what was happening,
    • along the way,
      o that they lost sight
      o of where they were going!
• For a whole generation,
  o the journey that was supposed to have been
    • the means of obtaining the promise,
  o became the obstacle that kept them
    • from receiving their inheritance.
• The wilderness would be littered
  o with the graves of those that died on the journey,
    • because they lost sight of the destination.

Heaven
Listen to me, church.
• If we are not careful,
  o we will allow the same thing to happen to us
    • that happened to them.
• As life closes in on us,
  o as circumstances try our faith,
    • if we are not cautious we will allow our souls
      • to become discouraged
        o because of the journey.
• If we are not vigilant
  o we will allow the journey
    • to cause us to become
      • bitter and cold.
• Mark my words,
  o I’ve seen it more times than I care to tell,
• it is very possible
  o to allow the journey
    • to cause that vital optimism
      • to shrivel up and die in your soul.
• God forbid that our hope
  o would become overshadowed
    • by cynicism and doubt.
• But, heed my warning church,
  o if we fail to keep our eyes on the prize
    • and to keep our perspective
      • centered on our destination,
  o we could end up just like those wayward Hebrews
    • who started out so full of faith and promise
      • but died in the journey,
        o empty and broken.

For just a moment this evening,
• you need to take your eyes
  o from your problems
    • and the challenges of day-to-day living
  o and once again make sure
    • that the desire of your soul
      • is centered upon your eternal destination.
• For just a little while tonight
  o you need to get heaven on your mind.
• I come to this pulpit to challenge you
  o to stop, for just a moment,
    • and lift your eyes from the journey
      • long enough to shift your focus
        o back to the promise.

One of my favorite passages of scripture is 1 Peter 1:3-6:

• (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
• (4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.
• (5) Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
• (6) Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

Peter said that we were born again “unto a living hope” (NKJV).
• Hope is that vital optimism
  o that recognizes that I’m living for something
    • better than what I have right now.
• Paul said, in Hebrews 6:19,
  o that hope is “an anchor for the soul.”
• You have to understand
  o how vitally important hope is to your soul.
• But first we need to clearly delineate
what we mean by hope.

This “hope” is not just some wishful thinking.

It is not just a whimsical wishing

for some unattainable thing.

It is an assurance that arises

from the promises of God.

Biblical “hope” is anchored in the promises of God.

It is convinced that God will do

what God has said he will do.

It is the unwavering faith

that the God who started me on this journey

will not abandon me along the way.

It is the faith that He who began a good work in me

is well able to finish

what He has started in my life.

Peter said that there is life in this hope, it is a “living hope.”

Spiritual life flows from your hope

in the promises of God.

In times of trial,

in times of trouble,

in times of heartache and pain,

your soul thrives on the promises of God.

Your soul thrives on the understanding

that this,

everything I see around me,

this is not the sum total of my life.

My hope is invested in something

much better than this!

When your hope is in this world

and the things of this world

it yields sorrow, pain and death.

But, when your hope is in the promises of God,

it is a living hope

that yields spiritual life!

So, Peter says, this hope compels us

out of a world of sin

towards “an inheritance incorruptible,

and undefiled,

and that fadeth not away.”

Hope is what started us on this journey.

Hope is what was born in your heart

when the gospel message was preached to you.

In hope you repented of your sins.
In hope you were baptized in his name
- and it was hope that resulted
  - in the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Hope is what started you on this journey,
- and make no mistake about it,
  - hope is what is going to keep you
    - on this journey!

Peter said that we would confront some heaviness
- and manifold temptations
  - along the way.
- This journey is going to get tedious
  - from time to time.
- This journey is going to try your faith,
  - this journey is going to challenge your resolve,
    - this journey will do all it can to destroy you.
- But don’t despair!
  - Peter said that, in those times,
    - we rejoice in our hope.
- You’ve got to get this:
  - You can’t afford to lose sight of heaven!
    - Heaven is the hope
      - that carries us through
        - whatever this life throws at us.
- Essentially Peter is reminding the church,
  - during a time of intense persecution
    - to keep her eyes on the prize.
- We are not living for what’s down here.
  - We are not living for a temporary reward.
    - There really is a heaven to gain.
- That, according to Peter,
  - should be the focus of the church
    - in times of trial and trouble.
- Heaven is the source of our joy!
  - We rejoice!
    - Not because the journey is easy,
      - but because the destination
        - is far greater than the journey!

There really is a city where the lamb is the light.
- There really is a city
  - where there never comes a night.
- There really is a city
  - where the half has never yet been told.
    - That’s where my hope lies!
• That city
  o is the source of my joy
    ▪ in times of trouble.
• That city
  o is the source of my hope
    ▪ in hopeless situations.
• That city
  o is the wellspring
    ▪ of unspeakable joy
      • in my life!
• For the next few moments
  o I want you to stop
    ▪ and focus your attention
      • on the promise.
• There is a day coming
  o when there will be no more heartaches.
• There is a day coming
  o when there will be no more pain and suffering.
• On that glorious day
  o when the trump of God will sound,
    ▪ all the trials of this present life
      • will be quickly forgotten
        o as we meet him in the sky.

Somebody needs to lift up your eyes for a moment!
• There’s coming a day,
  o when sorrow will be swallowed in joy,
    ▪ when death gives way to life,
      • when hope springs eternal.
• You’ll forget about the hard times, on that day.
  o You’ll forget about all the trials, on that day.
• When you look upon the one
  o who saved you by his grace,
    ▪ when you walk down streets of gold
      • and meet all your loved ones around the throne,
        o the things of this world
        o won’t matter anymore.
• Oh what singing,
  o oh what shouting,
    ▪ on that blessed day
      • when we all shall rise!
• Oh what glory,
  o hallelujah,
    ▪ when we meet our blessed savior
      • in the skies.
May I remind you tonight
• that you were singing
  o and you were dancing
    ▪ when you started on this journey!
• Whatever you do,
  o don’t let the journey rob you of your song.
• Whatever you do,
  o don’t let the toils and trials of this life
    ▪ cause you to forget how to dance!
• You see, the song and the dance
  o spring from that living hope
    ▪ of eternal life
      • that burns deep inside your soul.
• Don’t let that die!
  o Don’t let the fire go out!
    ▪ Don’t let hope be extinguished!
      ▪ Don’t die on the journey!
• It’s time to get your eyes on the prize.
  o This world may be where you are living
    ▪ but this world isn’t what you are living for!
• Come on somebody,
  o this world is not your home!

**Ecclesiastes**

Solomon said in Ecclesiastes
• that for everything
  o there is a time and a season.
• Life has an ebb and a flow.
  o It contains both joy and pain.
    ▪ Both good and bad.
    ▪ Rejoicing and weeping.
    ▪ Trials and triumphs.
• That’s just the nature of the journey.
  o There will be discomfits and hardships,
    ▪ disappointments and tragedies.
      • That’s all part of the journey.
• But the things of this life are temporal and temporary,
  o heartaches last but a season,
    ▪ trials come and they go,
    ▪ circumstances and situations arise along the way
      • but, mark my word,
        o they are as temporary
        o as the morning dew.
• Weeping the Bible says,
o may endure thru the night,
  ▪ but joy comes in the morning.

Don’t lose perspective:
• This life is the journey
  o that’s going to move you from here to glory,
  ▪ and you have to determine
    • that there is no way
      o that you’re going to let these temporal circumstances
        ▪ ever turn me away from your eternal destination.
• I’ve come this evening to encourage you
  o not to become so wrapped up in the here and the now
    ▪ that you lose sight of where you are going.
• I want to caution you
  o not to get too comfortable in this world,
    ▪ and not to get too caught up in all of its drama.
• You’re nothing to this world
  o but stranger and a pilgrim.
• You are no different than Abraham
  o who sojourned in the land of promise.
• He lived in a tent.
  o He never bought a home in Canaan land,
    ▪ because he recognized that the promise
      • that he was living for
        o was not in this world!
• As a matter of fact,
  o the only plot of land he ever owned in this world,
    ▪ was a burial plot,
      • because his hope was never in this world.
• You better make up your mind,
  o the only thing that you are ever going to own in this world
    ▪ is a grave,
      • because this world is not your home.
• You are a stranger here.
  o You are a pilgrim here.
    ▪ You’ve got a mansion on the other side of glory
      • and Heaven is your home!
• Nothing in this world
  o is worth missing heaven for!

The Faithful
In Hebrews the writer describes those who died in faith,
• not having yet received the promises,
but having seen them afar off.

- He says of these,
  - that although they never reached their destination,
    - they were fully persuaded of their promises,
      - and embraced them,
      - confessing that they were
        - strangers and pilgrims upon this earth.
  - Having caught a glimpse of things eternal,
    - they determined that this world was not their home,
      - and nothing that might befall them here
        - would ever stop them
          - from reaching their destination.
  - They had their eyes on the prize,
    - they centered all their hopes on the destination
      - and they determined to make heaven their home!

The writer goes on to say
- that they that say such things
  - declare plainly that they seek a country,
    - and truly, if they had cared at all about the country
      - from whence they came out,
        - they had ample opportunity to return.
- There were plenty of times during the journey
  - that if they had allowed their focus to shift
    - from their destination to this present life,
      - they could have lost their way along the way!
- They could have become so bogged down in this life
  - that they lost sight of the prize.
- But in answer to this fact
  - the writer declares
    - that they desired something better than this life
      - and nothing was going to turn them away
        - from their heavenly vision.
      - Because of this God was not ashamed
        - to be called their God!

Can I tell you tonight
- that life is going to give you
  - plenty of opportunities to lose your way
    - along the way.
- There are going to be times
  - when this life is going to bring you suffering,
    - and circumstances are going to be so overwhelming
      - that, if you allow your focus to shift
        - from your destination to this present life,
• the journey will rob you of your hope
  • and cause you to lose sight of your promise.

• We must get the same mindset
  o as those faithful saints of old
    ▪ that said, come what may,
      • my home is not in this world.
        o I’m not living for the here and now.
    o My hope is in things eternal,
      ▪ my home is far beyond the blue.
• I’ve caught a glimpse of glory
  o and nothing in this world can turn me around.

It is time for somebody to make up your mind.
• Yes this life is short and full of troubles.
  o Yes there will be trial and tribulations along the way.
• But nothing in this life
  o is ever going to cause me to lose my hope in heaven.
• I have determined that no matter what the journey brings to me,
  o it will never stop me from reaching my destination.

Keep Hope Alive
There are some under the sound of my voice
• that are in danger of losing out with God
  o because you’ve just about allowed
    o your current circumstances to overwhelm you.
• Perhaps you’ve let frustrations
  o and troubles cloud your vision.
• Perhaps you’ve allowed disappointments
  o and controversies to rob you of your joy.
• Perhaps you’ve let the storm clouds
  o that hover over your life
    ▪ cause you to falter in your faith.
• Whatever it is,
  o I’ve come to plead with you this evening.
• For just a little while,
  o would you lift your eyes from the road ahead
    ▪ and set them upon the prize
      • that you are living for.
• Stop and remember
  o that nothing in this world
    ▪ is worth missing heaven for.

We need to make up our minds,
• like those faithful saints of old,
The Journey

I we are living for something much greater than this life.

• I can endure hardships and pain for a season,
  • what’s a season compared to eternity.

• I can endure trials and tribulations for a time,
  • because I’m going to dwell in heaven for all of time.

• I can face any temptation,
  • any thing this life sends my way
    ▪ with the knowledge that God
      • has better things in store for me.

• One moment in eternity
  • is going to be far and away greater
    ▪ than a lifetime upon this earth.

• Whatever I do,
  • I’m not going to let the journey
    ▪ rob me of my hope!

I’ve come to encourage someone tonight, not to give up now.

• Don’t die during the journey.
  • Don’t let the journey kill your hope.

• It’s time to take your eyes off of these temporal things
  • and put them on the promise.

• Tonight you need to shift your focus
  • from the journey to the destination.

• We need to get heaven on our minds!
  • We need to get a vision of what it’s gonna be like
    ▪ one of these days.

• All the problems and controversies,
  • all of the cares and trials
    ▪ grow strangely dim in the glorious light of heaven.

• All of this, down here,
  • begins to matter so much less
    ▪ when we stir up the hope that is within us
      • and remember the reason for the journey.

Closing

It was a difficult time for us.

• It was not just an event,
  • it was not just a bad day
  • or a bad week,
  • or even a bad month...

• It was over 2 long years
  • of seemingly endless
    ▪ hardship and heartaches.

• It began with the birth of our first son.
  • Rocklan was 10lbs and 10oz.
The Journey

- The delivery was demanding
  - for both mother and child
    - and, when it was all finished
      - we learned that our bouncing baby boy
        - had been born with a hernia.

A hernia is not really that big of deal,
- its just a simple surgery,
  - but it is a very difficult thing
    - to stand in a preoperative waiting room
    - and place your 6 day old baby boy
    - into the hands of a surgeon
      - who is about to take him into that cold operating room
      - and put him under general anesthesia.

- It will try your faith,
  - to know that you have no other recourse
    - than just to let go
      - and trust God.

- What we didn’t know, though,
  - was that we would do this 5 different times
    - over the course of the first 2 years of his life.
  - Five times we would hand our baby boy over to surgeons.
    - Five times we would retreat to a waiting room
      - and anxiously wait for word
        - that everything was going to be OK.
  - Five times we would look to heaven for comfort
    - and reaffirm, again,
      - our trust in divine providence.

My second son, Harrison, was born 2 years and 23 days after his older brother.
- There was absolutely no indication,
  - before his birth,
    - that there was anything at all wrong with him.

- But at birth,
  - the doctors immediately recognized
    - a serious problem
    - and he was rushed from the delivery room
      - into intensive care.

- The initial prognosis was dreadful.
  - Our son’s heart was so enlarged,
    - in the initial x-ray,
      - that his lungs weren’t even visible.
  - He was dying.
They sent a special team by ambulance
  • to transport our baby boy to Children’s Hospital.
    o I’ll never forget standing in front of the plexiglass box
      ▪ that held my baby boy
      ▪ as the transport team told us
      ▪ to take a moment with him
        • because we may never see him alive again.
  • That day is a whirlwind in my mind.
    o We checked my wife out of the hospital,
      ▪ against doctor’s orders, only hours after the delivery
        • and we made a frantic and prayerful trip to Little Rock.
  • I’ll never forget pleading with God for my baby’s life...
    o And I’ll also never forget the news
      ▪ that awaited us on the other end of that drive.
    o The doctor said, “I don’t know what happened,
      ▪ but things are different now than they were a few hours ago...
        • There is hope!”

Eventually they determined
  • that my son had a natural blockage in his aorta
    o and emergency heart surgery
      ▪ was needed to save his life.
  • Once again I would be waiting in nervous anticipation
    o as I surrendered another 6-day-old baby
      ▪ to the surgeon’s knife.
  • I remember burying my head in my hands
    o and with tears of despair proclaiming,
      ▪ “I can’t do this again!”
  • But we did.
    o We turned our son over to God
      ▪ and God did what only he can do.
  • The surgery was successful,
    o and the prognosis was hopeful.
      ▪ And eventually we were able to return home.

The next morning I got up and went to work.
  • It was Wednesday.
    o When I left work that evening,
      ▪ the unthinkable happened.
  • My old truck threw a rod through the side of the engine block.
    o I was devastated.
      ▪ I couldn’t believe it.
    o After all we had been through,
      ▪ after everything else...
  • We were broke.
I hadn’t worked in weeks.
  • If it hadn’t of been for a financial blessing from the church
    • we wouldn’t have even been able to pay any bills.
• That night I gathered up my family
  o and we went to church,
    • because that’s what we do.
    • In the good times and the bad.
    • We go to church.

**STAND**

Now, I’ve got to be honest with you,
• it wasn’t a power house service that night.
  o It was just plain old, Wednesday night.
• I was discouraged,
  o my faith was at its lowest point,
• I was sitting on the platform,
  o going through the motions,
    • but my heart was simply broken within me.
• I don’t remember a lot about that service,
  o except that somewhere along the way
• Sister Renee Houston began to sing...

*It’s gonna be worth it all...*

*It’s gonna be worth it all...*

*It’s gonna be worth it all some beautiful happy day.*

• Something began to stir on the inside.
  o Hope began to rise up in my soul.
• It was like something broke inside of me.
  o All of my frustrations,
  o my worries and my fears,
    • all of it was overshadowed
    • by the hope of heaven.

*It’s gonna be worth every long mile.*

*Every heartache and every trial.*

*It’s gonna be worth it all some beautiful happy day!*

• I’ll never forget that service.
  o I’ll never forget that moment.
• When the journey was just about to overwhelm me,
  o the hope of heaven came shining through!

I’ve come to encourage you today.
• Don’t let this journey rob you of your hope.
Don’t let this life steal your promise!

- You need to take a moment
  - and let go of the trials and troubles of this life
    - and recognize that it is going to be worth it all
    - one of these days!

Don’t lose that vital optimism.

- The best is yet to come.
  - No matter how bad today may be,
    - there will always be a better tomorrow.
- Because I’m living for a promise,
  - an inheritance incorruptible,
  - and undefiled,
  - and that fadeth not away...

It’s time to make up your mind:

- I’m gonna make it!
  - I’m gonna make heaven my home.
- Come and stir up the hope of heaven in your heart.
  - Come and drink from the refreshing of the presence of God.
  - You were singing and dancing when you started this journey!
    - It’s time to renew your song!!!

Don’t let the journey overwhelm you.

- Let hope rise in your heart!