

“WHAT HOPE!”  
I Samuel 1:4-20, Mark 13:1-8, I Samuel 2:1-10  
November 13 & 14, 2021

“A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, ‘Eighteen to nothing – we’re behind.’

“Boy,’ said the spectator, ‘I’ll bet you’re discouraged.’

“Why should I be discouraged?’ replied the little boy. ‘We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet!’”<sup>1</sup>  
Oh, the indescribable determination and hope of a child!

But not all people have this kind of hope facing such insurmountable odds. **Many people today are finding their hope wasting away amid tremendous persecution, oppression and hardship.**

There are so many things taking place in our world today that can easily cause people to lose hope. If it’s not devastating storms that blow apart or wash away their homes and belongings, it might be fires that burn everything up. It might be the disastrous results of riots and mob violence that destroys businesses. It could be a crippling pandemic and the overreaching mandates of masks and vaccines, threatening jobs and livelihoods. It could be a dreadful diagnosis of an incurable disease or the death of your month-old child. It might be the slow disintegration of mental capacity brought on by dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. It could be the persecution that comes because you belong to a certain religious organization or having a particular theological perspective. It could be lost jobs, a poor grade on a major test, a break-up of a long and deep relationship, or even a change of address can bring about a sense of hopelessness.

And unfortunately there are some who give up hope because they have the belief that disappointment is sure to happen, dashing our dreams and causing us to wonder where God is, IF God even exists. So many people put their hope in the people around them, the plans they put together for themselves, or the sky-high dreams that are bound to fail. So many people lose hope because they do not put their trust and faith in the Lord God Almighty. Somewhere in their lives, they have become

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 451)

disappointed with God and so they give up on Him, altogether, thinking that He is just like anyone else around us and cannot change anything in our lives. They do not know that hope is built upon the belief that God has the very best planned for them, and then, setting their lives into action exerting the grit and determination to make it happen. And **they forget that faith in God is the best hope.**

In his book, *the Grand Essentials*, Thornton Wilde makes this great statement. “Hope is a projection of the imagination; [but] so is despair. Despair all too readily embraces the **ills** it foresees; hope is an energy that arouses the mind to explore every possibility to combat [those ills]. In response to hope, the imagination is aroused to picture every possible issue, to try every door, to fit together even the most heterogeneous pieces in the puzzle. After the solution has been found it is difficult to recall the steps taken – so many of them are just below the level of consciousness.”<sup>2</sup>

You see, **hope drives us onward even in the face of a brick wall or sheer cliff.** It opens up our eyes to see the possible alternatives to the path we were taking, allowing us to alter our journey in stages so that we can continue to head in the desired direction. It is looking for a solution to our problem in every possible venue we can find. It’s looking for the chink in the enemy’s armor, or the missing scale in the dragon’s massive coat of arms in order to overcome evil. It is looking beyond the present difficulty to visualize a remedy to the situation, and doing everything possible to overcome the odds of survival. **Hope is hanging on to faith in the Lord our God with all your might.**

Take for example this situation from World War II. “In his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl tells of his years trapped in the indescribable horrors of Auschwitz and Dachau Concentration Camps in Germany. He was transported there like a despised animal, given two minutes to strip naked or be [severely] whipped, every hair was shaved from his body, and he was condemned to a living death. His father, mother, brother, and wife died in the camps or were sent to the gas ovens. His existence was full of cold, fear, starvation, pain, lice and vermin, dehumanization, exhaustion, and terror.

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<sup>2</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 275-6)

“Frankl wrote that he was able to survive because he never lost the quality of hope. Those prisoners who lost faith in the future were doomed. When a prisoner lost hope, Frankl said, he let himself decline, becoming subject to mental and physical decay. He would die from the inside out.

“Frankl stated that this usually happened quite suddenly. One morning a prisoner would just refuse to get up. He wouldn’t get dressed or wash or go outside to the parade grounds. No amount of pleading by his fellow prisoners would help. No threatening by the captors would have any effect. Losing all hope, he had simply given up. He would lay there in his own excrement until he died. American soldiers later told Frankl that this behavior pattern existed also among prisoners of war, and was called ‘give-up-itis.’

“When a prisoner lost hope, said Frankl, ‘he lost his spiritual hold.’”<sup>3</sup>

Hal Lindsey made the very important statement for us to remember. He said, “**We can live forty days without food, eight days without water, four minutes without air, but only a few seconds without hope.” Without hope there is no reason to try. Without hope there is no reason to dream. Without hope there is no reason to look at the future. If we have no hope within us, we die; mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Where there is no hope, there is no life.**

**But in my experience, the only One we can truly hope in is the Lord God Almighty.** He never fails to give us what we truly hope for. He is faithful to provide us with that which we come to Him to seek, as we put our trust and faith in Him, confident that He is able to accomplish what we ask for. And we see that in our Old Testament lesson today of I Samuel 1:4-20.

Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. It was a time in history when it was permissible to have more than one wife. God had blessed Peninnah with children, but had kept Hannah from having children (I Sam. 1:2). And what a burden that was for Hannah. She so desired to have children, but having none, Peninnah “*would torment and humiliate her, because the Lord had kept her childless. This went on year after year; whenever they went to the house of the Lord, Peninnah would upset Hannah so*

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<sup>3</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 449-450)

*much that she would cry and refuse to eat anything” (1:6-7).*

However, Hannah refused to give up hope. You see, she knew about her ancestor, Sarah, who herself had been childless until she was very old. While Sarah had given up hope for children and begged Abraham to have children through her slave girl, Hagar, God had not given up on Sarah. The Lord told Abraham, “nine months from now I will come back, and your wife Sarah will have a son” (Genesis 18:10). Sarah did not believe it, but “*the Lord asked Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son’*” (Gen. 18:13-14).

What a promise! **Is anything too hard for the Lord?** The answer to that is a resounding “NO!” Even in the most desperate situation, when all the odds are stacked up against you, there is nothing impossible with God! The key is to continue to have hope in what the Lord promises He can deliver.

Hannah had Sarah’s example to hold close to her so that even as her life went on without children, she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God could make it happen. Her hope caused her to turn to the Lord in the Temple in Shiloh, crying out to Him desperately. She pleaded with the Lord for a child, even going so far as to make a promise to Him. “*Lord Almighty, look at me, your servant! See my trouble and remember me! Don’t forget me! If You give me a son, I promise that I will dedicate him to You for his whole life...*” (I Sam. 1:11).

Now, I have to tell you that **God takes very seriously the prayers of those who desperately seek Him.** God hears us when we pray to Him with our whole heart, and He delights to supply us with all that we need. In this case, Hannah needed God’s provision for a son whom she would give back to the Lord for His service. And even when Eli, the priest, misunderstood her prayer style, praying silently but moving her mouth as if speaking aloud, Eli came to understand the desperation in Hannah. He blessed her and assured her that the Lord God had heard her, giving her hope that He would surely answer her prayer. And very soon after returning home, Hannah became pregnant and God blessed her with a son.

**It was her hope in the Lord that caused her to seek the help of the Lord.** Hannah may have tried every home remedy, every suggestion given by those around her, and may even have resorted to the wacky and far-out suggestions of other women. But when everything else failed, she turned to the Lord for His help, knowing that He is the one who gives life and blesses women with children.

But many people today lose their hope for some reason, and then turn to drugs, or alcohol, or illicit sex to find some meaning and purpose in their life. Their deep longing drives them to extreme measures. But none of these things bring us meaning and purpose. They are cheap alternatives that Satan has put into our society that pacifies or dulls our deep desires until we waste away. They are avenues to the “give-up-itis” condition that only brings death.

And we see it clearly in our society today. Drug and alcohol abuse is running rampant, even at very early ages. Depression and other mental illnesses are spiking at new levels. Domestic abuse and sex trafficking are at all-time high levels, too. Divorce is prevalent. Suicide is high, especially among middle aged males. It all comes from a sense of hopelessness, believing that there is nothing good in the future and that no one can help us out of the tough situations we find ourselves in.

And it comes as more and more Americans are giving up on God and trying to make things happen on their own with their own wisdom, their own strength and their own understanding about life. But when our lives are so limited by human resources, hope can be in short supply. If we hope in human resources alone, failure is certain to come, and hopelessness abounds. And when all of our attempts at finding life fail us, where will we turn? **Where can we seek our help? Psalm 124:8 gives us the answer, “*Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*”** He is the One whom we can trust. God is the One who has provided us the One we can hope in and find life through.

You see, Jesus saw that these days would be troubling for us. He knew that the things of this world would bring great concern and difficulties for all people. Mark 13 helps us to see that Jesus knew what would come to us in these days. And rather than tell the Disciples that everything would be ok, Jesus laid out all that would happen to them so that they would know what was ahead of them.

**Jesus did not want us to be caught blindsided about all the things of the world.** He did not want us to become so overwhelmed with kingdoms attacking other kingdoms, and false messiahs proclaiming that they could save everybody, and natural disasters happening all over the earth (Mark 13:5-8). Jesus wanted us to know about them so that we would not lose hope and give up, but rather recognize the signs of the times and prepare for His return (Mark 13:24-27). Jesus warned His followers of all that would happen to them, not to scare them away from Him, or make them so hopeless that they gave up, but so that they could see what was ahead and prepare their lives for it. Jesus told them of what would happen so that they could keep their trust in Him and rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to live as His witnesses of God's plan of salvation for the world.

All of Jesus' prophecies about the "end times" was told to us so that we would remain hopeful that beyond all of the trials, and troubles, and difficulties, and terrors that would come upon us, if we kept our faith and trust in Him, we could hope for life beyond this life where we would have eternal life, with none of the problems and struggles we are to face here on the earth. **Jesus told us what would happen so that we could put our trust in Him,** knowing that this life is not all there is to live, but when we believe and trust and follow Him, even if we go through tremendously difficult times, we will find ourselves in the kingdom of the Father, where no evil and wickedness will be allowed to attack us or even be present among us. When we have the Good News of the Gospel of God through Jesus Christ living in us, there is no room for discouragement and hopelessness, because we know that no matter what will come upon us, we will be with Him.

And when we have that hope within us, when God provides those things we desperately seek in our lives, we can respond much like Hannah did. Listen to her prayer of thanks and praise. (READ 1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Do we have doubt about the strength and power of the Lord our God? Then we need to visit the accounts of the Bible that tell us of God's wondrous care and guidance and protection for His people. When we put our trust and faith in the Lord our God, when we profess that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all

and has paid the price for our sins through His death and resurrection, when we believe in and receive the power of the Holy Spirit of God into our own lives, then no matter what this world throws at us, we will not have any fear, but find great hope for our lives. Who knows but that in the midst of the struggles and trials that we face, God might use us to touch the lives of those around us, even to our enemies, giving them a trustworthy witness to what the Lord our God can do when we have Him with us.

“The late Dr. Donald Barnhouse, greatly admired American pastor and author, once came to the pulpit and made a statement that stunned his congregation: ‘Prayer changes nothing!’ You could have heard a pin drop in that packed Sunday worship service in Philadelphia.

“His comment, of course, was designed to make Christians realize that God is sovereignly in charge of everything. Our times are literally in His hands. No puny human being by uttering a few words in prayer takes charge of events and changes them. God does the shaping, the changing; it is He who is in control.

“Barnhouse was correct, except in one minor detail: **Prayer changes me. When you and I pray, we change**, and that is one of the major reasons prayer is such a therapy that counteracts anxiety.”<sup>4</sup>

Prayer is built upon the hope that God hears our requests and that He has the power to answer those requests according to His will and His time. And thank goodness that God does not answer our every prayer. Though He hears our every prayer, God knows what is best for us, and what is most needed in our lives so that we can continue to live as His servants, bringing about His plan of Salvation for the world. He knows the things He has planned for us, “*plans for welfare and not calamity, to give us a future and a hope*” (Jeremiah 29:11). He knows what is best for us and provides those things in our lives to guide and direct us to accomplish His work in this world.

Hannah trusted the Lord God, so she prayed to Him, knowing that it was His desire and delight

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<sup>4</sup> (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 451)

to give His best to her. Her words of prayer did not make the changes to her childlessness, but her prayer did bring her hope that the Lord God Almighty would continue to use her as His servant, with children or not. And her prayer of praise exalted the Lord when He did open Hannah's womb to bring forth a son, who would become a powerful servant of the Lord, calling the people of Israel back to the worship of the Lord.

**So it is good for us to have hope in our lives so that we can provide examples of God's love for us to the world.** Hope brings life, and "hope is never ill when faith is well" (John Bunyan). When life seems to have fallen out from under us, hope is what can carry us along as we have faith in the Lord our God.

And that is a powerful example to our world from here in this church. When we demonstrate hope here in this place, when everything surrounds our faith and trust in God's commands, when we live in hope for the future with confidence that God will guide us and direct us as we live in obedience to Him, people will notice that and be attracted to us. **That is the theme most needed in our world today, hope and trust in the Lord our God.**

A. W. Tozer makes a tremendously important statement in his book, *Whatever Happened to Worship*, (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1985, pg. 65). He says, "The average person in the world today, without faith and without God and without hope, is engaged in a desperate personal search throughout his lifetime. He does not really know where he has been. He does not really know what he is doing here and now. He does not know where he is going. The sad commentary is that he is doing it all on borrowed time and borrowed money and borrowed strength – and he already knows that in the end he will surely die." The church offers hope through our Savior Jesus Christ, but we need to become better at living that hope so that the world might see it and find it in their own life through Jesus.

**Without hope there is no life, but "while there's life, there is hope" (Cicero).** Cultivate that mighty hope in the Lord Jesus Christ in your life so that you leave a lasting legacy in a world that needs hope so desperately. Let's pray...

Father, we are surrounded by so much stuff that seeks to steal our hope in You. The things of this world get to be so overwhelming, and we begin to think that no one and no thing can answer our call for help. But You are the Only One who can bring us the help and protection and support we need to continue on in our lives. Give us such faith in You that we put our today, our tomorrow and our every day beyond today in Your hands in order that we might have the hope of eternal life. **“Hope is a continual looking forward to the eternal world” (C. S. Lewis)** that You have promised us, if we remain faithful to Jesus Christ our Lord. Hold us close today, hear our prayers, and provide us with Your provision so that we might be Your servants in our world today, tomorrow and into the future. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. AMEN.