



TIME OF GRACE®

Christmas Buzzwords: Hope

Study Notes

Summary

How do you define *hope*? We all agree that hope is a good thing to hold on to, but what exactly is it? And what happens if you put your hope in the wrong thing? This message will help you define one of Christmas' important words—*hope*.

- “If I could find a way to package and dispense hope, I would have a pill more powerful than any antidepressant on the market.”—Dr. Dale Archer
- **1 Timothy 6:17:** Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God.
- What is hope? A _____ - _____
_____.
- **Hebrews 10:23:** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
- Where does hope come from? Hope is a for-sure future from a _____ God.
- **Isaiah 40:31:** Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
- Who needs hope? Hope is for the _____ (and everyone else!).

Points to Ponder

1. List three tragic consequences of defining *hope* as simply a wish, a want, or a personal desire.

2. Which of the five passages quoted in today's message was most meaningful to you personally? What made that passage stand out above the rest?

Homework for Next Week

Ponder what earthly happiness and spiritual joy have in common. Then consider what makes them distinct.

Time of Grace Ministry
Christmas Buzzwords: Hope
1 Timothy 6:17; Hebrews 10:23; Isaiah 41:31
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Have you ever stopped to wonder why there are four words that show up so often during this time of the year that do not show up that much during other times of the year? The words hope, and joy, and peace, and love.

Like, if a couple of months ago, I would have said to you, "It is August, the season of hope," you would have said, "Well, the holidays are in December and Christmastime. That just sounds right, but not August." Or, "February, the time of joy." Like, why is it, historically and traditionally, that we take those four words and just cram them into everything we do at this time of year? And the answer, the history books could actually tell us.

Are you ready to go on a 2,000-year history ride? How about this? In the centuries after Jesus walked the earth, the followers of Jesus, called Christians, started to come up with traditions to remember all of these things that Jesus said and did, and the promises that he made. And in about the 500's, there was a group of French Christians who decided that near the end of the calendar year they were going to fast, or not eat any food, for three days a week to remind themselves that they were hungering for the return of Jesus Christ, what the Bible calls the judgment day.

And in the next century, the 600's A.D., there was a Catholic pope named Gregory the Great who decided to make that time of the year official. The four Sundays before Christmas would now be called the season of Advent. Advent is a Latin word that means coming, because those French Christians were thinking about the second coming of Jesus, and they kind of tacked on his birth to that, the first coming and the second coming. That was what the season was all about.

Fast forward about a millennium. Go to the 1500's in Germany, and some Christians there decided to come up with this wreath where they would plop four candles in it and light them Sunday after Sunday during Advent, and to them, those candles symbolized their hope, and their peace, and their joy, and their love that they had with Jesus.

Now, personally, as a pastor and as a follower of Jesus, I am not too riled up, you know, that we do not keep every tradition that ancient Christians used to. That is man-made stuff that Jesus did not teach, so it is not required. But what does honestly concern me a little bit is that people like you, and people like me, we maybe have lost sight of four of the Bible's best words. Like, we still use them. We still talk about the power of hope, and all you need is love, and you can rejoice today, or would it not be great to have peace on earth? Like, we repeat these things and use these words, but is it possible that we have lost connection with their original meaning?

Like, if I forced you, just like, handpicked a person and made you sit up here on this stool, and in front of everyone else in church, everyone watching online, watching at home, I grilled you and said, "What is hope? And is joy just happiness, or something different? And what is biblical peace? Tell me." Would you break a sweat? The answer is probably. We like, kind of maybe sort of know, but we are not positive, and personally, I think that is a problem. Because you, by God's design, are kind of like a fancy new cell phone. Like, the way that God made you and your soul is that you have incredible potential. If God could fill you up with his word, and his spirit, and his truth, you could do things that would be hard for your neighbors to believe. And so, God gives you these words.

It is like the power cord that he plugs into you - words like hope, and joy, and peace, and love, and so many more, but the problem is if you unplug those words from the wall, if we take those four amazing Bible words and devest them, unplug them from their original biblical meaning, what eventually happens to you? Well, the same thing what happens to your phone. You are connected, but not really.

And so, that is the problem I want to fix. If I was going to summarize my goals for this sermon series, it would simply be to take you and these words, and to plug them back in. To open this book and find all of the places where it talks about hope, and joy, and peace, and love, and to be able to charge up our hearts with all that God originally intended with those words.

Let us kick things off today with our first word, the word "hope." I love what Dr. Dale Archer wrote in an article in, "Psychology Today," about hope. He said this. "If I could find a way to package and dispense hope, I would have a pill more powerful than any antidepressant on the market." Hope is what helps addicts get sober. Life could be different. Hope is what happens when a married couple separates, but they work on it hard in counseling and get back together. The future could be different. Hope is someone who is living with guilt and shame, but they think, "You know, if I would seek God and cling to the cross of Jesus, I would not have to feel like this when I wake up."

And so, Dr. Archer is right. Hope is powerful. It is more powerful than any pill, any promise the world can make. God knows that we need hope. But...but have you ever noticed how people use the word, "hope?" "I hope so." "Is tomorrow going to be a good day?" "I hope so." "I hope my team wins the game today." "I hope my kid stops talking back and rebelling against me. I hope we can work things out." "I hope they find a cure." "I hope the American government stops being so crazy." "I hope the headlines stop." "I hope the racism ends." "I hope Mom and Dad can stop arguing." "I hope." "Is it likely to happen?" "I hope so." You know, we throw the word, "hope," onto anything that we kind of want, or kind of wish, or that we kind of prefer, but is it guaranteed? Is it probably going to happen? Is it maybe going to happen? Is it a long shot? We throw the word, "hope," on top of all of that, and when we do that, here is the tragic part. We unplug the amazing word, "hope," from what God intended it to be. Hope becomes some pie in the sky wish, and the power of hope, that literally can change hearts and lives, gets lost.

But that is why I am glad you are here today. Because today, I get to share with you some of the nerdy Bible research that I got to do this month. I went from cover to cover in this book, with the help of some wonderful Bible software, and read every single passage that mentions the word, "hope," 180 of them from cover to cover, and what I found in this book is so much better than some human wants, or some random wish, or some, "I hope so," kind of sentiments. What I found in all of these passages is real hope that can make a real difference in your family, in your faith, and in your life.

Now, if you are watching at home on TV, I know the clock is ticking until the next show begins. And if you are here live, you are thinking, "180 passages? It is going to be a long night." So, we ain't got time for all of that! So, there are three things I want to cover with you today. I just want to open up to three different passages about hope, three pretty famous ones, and I want to answer - what is hope, where is hope, and who needs hope? So, we are going to open this book. We are going to answer the whats, and the where, and the who, and God willing, we are going to get plugged into the power of hope.

All right, so let us start with the first part. What exactly is hope? Now, sometimes on occasion the Bible will use the word "hope" like you and I do. The Apostle Paul will say, "I hope I get out of jail and get to see you face to face." But most of the time, the Bible reserves the word "hope" for something much better and much more of a blessing for us. Let me give you one passage to prove it. This is in 1 Timothy 6, and in Verse 17, Paul says this. "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God."

Now, notice Paul's logic. Paul says to his pastor friend, Timothy, "I want you to tell all the rich people in your church not to put their hope in money," and did you catch his reasoning? "Because it is so uncertain. If there are people, Timothy, at your church who think, "If I just got the promotion, if I could just pay off these debts, if God would just bless me with a winning ticket for the lottery, if I could double my income, my future would be so much better," but Paul says, "Maybe."

But if you grew up like I did in the 90s and you loved hip-hop like I did, you might remember the song, "Mo Money Mo Problems." Have you ever heard that one? Notorious B.I.G., he told us sometimes more money does not make life better, sometimes it gives you more problems. It is not a certain place to put your hope. And man, if you live in 21st century America, we could say that about a lot of stuff, right? You put your hope in your Christmas list, like it is going to make next year better - just like you did last year. You put your hope in a new election, in a new bill, in new legislation. You put your hope in the latest social media posts, the latest video game, the latest project at work, the latest relationship, the latest date you go on. Like, will that make life better? Well, maybe.

But Paul did not want Timothy to let the Christians in his city connect the word "hope" to something so uncertain. And so, he says, "Tell them not to put their hope in money, but to put their hope in God." So, if someone asks me, "Pastor Mike, what does the word "hope" mean?" Grab your pen, because here is the answer that I would give. What is hope? I would call it a "for

sure future." So, let me ask you to put down your pens, your phones, your devices, especially if you are watching at home, and let me see if you got it. I am going to say something about the future, and if what I say sounds like biblical hope, if it is guaranteed and for sure, I want you to give me a double thumbs up. If it is very, very unlikely to happen, I want you to give me a double thumbs down. And if it is a maybe, kind of, sort of, I hope so, you can give me a one up and one down. Okay, you got it?

Let us see if you understand biblical hope. I hope the Coronavirus is the last pandemic we ever face on this planet. Yeah, probably not, if you know the history of the world. Okay. I hope that God our Father will be with us during the next pandemic. Yes, he will. I hope it will be 78 degrees tomorrow. If you are watching in Fort Myers, Florida, that is a maybe, but here in Wisconsin I am seeing a lot of double thumbs down. I hope that Jesus will walk with us, no matter what the temperature tomorrow. I hope that when my daughters are teenagers, they love it when I hold their hands and walk down the high school hallways. What? You are killing me, parents!

How about this? I hope that Jesus will forgive me for the stuff I am scared to confess to other people. Yes, he will. I hope God will use my separation, my argument, and my drama for something good in my life. I hope that Jesus will come back and make life better. I hope that he will end all suffering. I hope that he will end all pain. I hope that there will never be mourning, or death, or crying, or grieving again. I hope that Jesus will make all things new. Yes, that is biblical hope. It might not happen today or tomorrow, but it will happen because God has promised.

And friends, hope - hope is why I brought back this rope. Some of you have seen my rope before. I put this 2-inch piece of black tape on the end of a 150-foot rope I bought from Amazon, and biblical hope is where God says, "You know, right now life might be dark and it might be messy, and maybe your body does not feel like you want it to, maybe you are facing tons of pressure at work, maybe this world is so broken you want to cry when you open the newspaper, maybe your closest relationships are really complicated right now, but it will not be like this forever." That God has given his guarantee that there is a tomorrow where we will wake up and things will be different, and they will be better. And God, in his incredible mercy and love, says that he will change things. What is hope? God says hope is our for sure future. And that brings us to part number two. We talked about what is hope?

Second, I want to talk about where is hope? Check out this great passage from Hebrews 10. The author there said, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Now, why can you hold onto biblical hope? Like, unswervingly, without a doubt, without a second guess? Well, the answer is because the one who promised, the God who promised, is faithful. When God says something in the Bible about the future, he is not guessing, because he is God.

In other words, God is not like your super-optimistic, the glass is always half full kind of friend. And if you have a friend like that who just thinks everything is going to work out, always sees the silver lining - if you are sitting next to that friend right now, the friend who says, "I am sure it

is going to be fine. I am sure the lump is nothing. I am sure he is going to come back to you. I am sure you will work it out. I am sure...I am sure if God closes a door, he is going to - he is going to open one." Right, that friend? And that is a rip on your friend that I have not met just yet, but she does not know that. She does not. She is guessing. She hopes so. But she earthly hopes so. She wants and she wishes, but she does not know the future and neither do you, but guess who does? God.

And so, when God promises something about your tomorrow, he already sees the tomorrow. When God says, "Maybe not tomorrow and maybe not the day after, but someday soon, this will happen," who in all the universe has the power to stop God from making it happen? The reason you and I can put our hope in biblical hope is because the God who promised is faithful.

So, grab your pens and write it down this way. Now, we talked about what is hope. Where is hope? Hope is a for sure future that comes from a faithful God. And brothers and sisters, this is why I love Joe's t-shirt. Actually, if you are live here in church today, would you turn around for a second and look at the guy standing at that camera? That is Joe. Can you say hi to Joe? Hi, Joe. Joe is not just one of the nicer guys you are going to meet after church, he also has the largest collections of cool Christian t-shirts that I have ever seen. And he is wearing a shirt today that I asked him - I requested something for Joe's wardrobe, and just in case you cannot see it in the back, in the darkness, let me show you a picture of it. Joe has a great shirt that says, "Hope will not be canceled." You know, the game might be canceled, and the school year might be canceled, the holiday parade might be canceled, the Thanksgiving dinner might be canceled, but there is one thing that will not and cannot be canceled - hope.

Because, as Hebrews 10 says, the God who promised us is faithful. Man, and this is why - maybe starting today for some of you for the first time, I want you all to become people who read the Bible. I just want to say that. Like, unashamedly, unabashedly, before you reach for the paper, before you grab your phone, before Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, before a football game, before anything, I want you to become the kind of person who, every single day, reaches for the Bible, and here is why.

When your team has the number one draft pick and there is an amazing pick that could like, change the franchise for a decade to come, you are the kind of person, when someone makes a prediction about tomorrow and it is good, you get jacked up about it. Except you spend most of your time, like I do, reading predictions of people who have no clue about the future.

So today, I am asking you to become the kind of person who gets connected to the only one who knows the future. You know, every single Christian in their life has to come to that point when they just make a decision to stop figuring out how they feel on any given day, and they just do it. Maybe you are going to be the only woman in your circle of friends who, when she wakes up, she does not check social media and then post an update and take a picture of her breakfast, she opens up the Word and she fills up her soul with the only thing that can really make you feel good for the long term - not some want, or wish, or guess, but the promise of a faithful God.

Friends, hope is a beautiful thing. It is a for sure future. And where do you find it? In the words of a faithful God. If you do that, like Joe's t-shirt says, your hope will not be canceled.

And that brings us to one last question, the question, who? Who out there needs hope? Well, my short answer is everyone! You know, who does not need that? But one of the Bible's most famous passages about hope mentions a group of you in particular. That passage is Isaiah 40:31, and it says this. "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint."

Who needs hope? People who feel like they cannot even walk, they cannot run, they are faint, they are weak, they are tired, they are weary. Read this whole chapter and you will find out that the Bible says even young men grow weary. That even high school juniors, who should be so strong, that their bodies are about as strong as they will get, even guys like that can grow weary. But those who put their hope in the Lord can renew their strength. If you are taking notes, I would fill in the last blank this way. Who needs hope? Hope is for the weary. For everyone else, too, but especially for the tired, the weak, and the weary.

And so, maybe God has a special word for you today. If you came into church today or you are watching at home and you are just - you are tired. You are physically, emotionally, just...you are tired. You are tired of trying to say no to that same old temptation, and some days getting it right and lots of days getting it wrong. You are tired. You are tired of your family being as messy and as argumentative as it is. Why cannot you just unconditionally love and forgive? And you are tired. You are tired of working in the same thing, day after day after day, week after week, and month after month. You are tired. You are tired of this country. You are tired of your chronic pain. You are tired of depression. You are just - you are done with it and you cannot do it anymore.

If that is you, the Bible says put your hope in the Lord, because Jesus invited us. "Come to me, all of you who are worn out, and downtrodden, and weary, and I will give you rest. I will make things different. I will speak a word to you that will get you up off your knees and let you walk again, let you run again - like an eagle, let you soar again." Jesus Christ says that you can come to him and find the kind of hope that can make the tiredest Christian get ready to run the race of faith, that you could say, with the Apostle Paul, "I can do this. I am not giving up."

No, I am going to keep trusting in God, even if my body hurts like it used to hurt. She and I, it was a bad day, it was a bad week. Things got intense, but it does not have to be like that. We can love each other. God can help us. Man, I said yes to that sin a thousand times, but today is a new day and I can do all things through the one who gives me strength, the one who gives me hope. I am not giving up. I am not giving in. I do not have to, because there is a faithful God who walks with me - a God who is so faithful and so for me that he came into this world.

That 2,000 years ago, Jesus left the glory of heaven, and he came and he lived, and he died and he rose so that you and I could have hope - we could have the hope of eternal life. Brothers and sisters, plug yourself in to this word and to this God, to this Savior who came into the world to be

your light and your hope, and you will start to walk, some of you will start to run, and many of you will start to soar. That is the power of one of the Bible's greatest gifts, the gift of hope.

Let us pray.

Father, in many ways we wish we did not have to wait for the future. Many of us would love it if you could just snap your fingers and make things better before this prayer is over, but we know life does not work that way and you have purposes, even in the midst of our pain, and so, God, we wait for you. We are strong, and we take heart, and we wait for you, because you are worth waiting for.

I want to pray today, God, for everyone there who has kind of stayed on the fringes when it comes to faith. They show up a Sunday or two, on Christmas and Easter, but they have not taken that step to plug themselves in to the hope that you offer. For those who have been intimidated by the Bible or tried in the past but do not have that regular connection, Father, you want to speak to them.

You want to speak to us day after day, so that we would always have hope. We would always have a reason to get up, and run, and fight the good fight, and run this race called faith. Help us, God. Do not let the devil dupe us to look to other voices and other sources who are simply guessing to find our hope. We want to look to you. So, help us establish those habits and get rooted in Jesus.

One more thing, God. I thank you for the hope that is already ours. It is not based on how many church services we attend or how many chapters of the Bible we read. Thank you for sending Jesus to be born in this world, that we could have real hope.

I pray today, Father, for everyone who is hurting, everyone who is struggling. Never, ever let them believe that this will endure forever. The only thing that endures forever is you, and your love, and the grace that we find through Jesus. So, God, help us to get up tomorrow and fight again, to try again, to work again, and to know that behind us every step of the way will be the God who is faithful, the God who gives hope.

We pray all of these things in Jesus' beautiful name. And all of God's people who wanted more hope in their hearts, they joined their voices and they said, "Amen."