

Part 12: We are a hopeful conference.

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The word hope has applications that fall along a wide spectrum of understandings. At one end of the spectrum, a young teenage lady hopes that a certain young man will ask her out on a date. At the other end a middle age recently widowed woman lives from one disability payment to the next, unable to work due to health issues, looking for help with her prescriptions, and a way to pay her electric bill, all the while holding on to the hope that there are brighter days ahead. Each one of us will find ourselves on that spectrum as we go from day to day. What distinguishes a disciple of Jesus is what we allow hope to do for us.

Abraham Miller is quoted: a man begins to die when he ceases to expect anything from tomorrow. The state of our world could easily cause us to lament our future and any sense of hope for what is to come. The country's moral decline, the threat of domestic terrorism, race issues, an uncertain economy, and so many more obstacles all gang up together to leave us with feelings of despair and a sense of hopelessness.

The hope we have is based upon the certainty of the new life that is ours by virtue of Jesus' saving work on the cross 2,000 years ago. This hope we have is strengthened day by day as we continue to experience the purifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This hope gives us a confident expectation for what is ahead of us. The apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. This is hope. An expectation that God, in his faithfulness, will continue to work on our behalf as we look out beyond the present into the future that is before us.

The Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church has a long history of a living, active hope based upon the promises found in scripture and the faithfulness of a holy and righteous God. This hope that we hold onto rises above the turmoil of prejudice, provides a moral compass and energizes the compassion to meet the basic needs that people face each and every day. The things going on in the world around us test us and tempt us to want to give up or give in. The easiest thing for any person to do is to despair and become frustrated by what he sees in the suffering and pain of the world. But, we know that this is only temporary and one day it will give way to eternal glory. This hope informs how we will plan, live and work in this present life. We have a great God who has done a great thing, who is doing great things in and through his people right now and our unwavering hope is to ask, why should we expect anything different?

Bible Study

Romans 8:18-25

Have you ever eagerly expected something that did not come off as planned? How did you handle your disappointment? In Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, he has been writing about the glory of our adoption into the family of God. At the same time, he reminds his readers of the turmoil that their present world consists of. This creation is a decaying and a dying world but all the while it is waiting for God's glory to become a reality. He then moves from creation to man and his human longing for this glory.

Paul, in verse 24 makes a tremendous claim. We are saved by hope. Paul operates on the basis that our human situation is not a hopeless situation. He sees salvation as past, present and future. It is past because of the work of Christ on the cross that took place at one point in history. We were saved the moment we placed our trust and belief in Jesus Christ. It is present because we are being saved through the ongoing, sanctifying, purifying work of the Holy Spirit to make us holy. It is future in that, while we have not fully and completely received all the blessings of salvation, we can look forward with expectation to what awaits us and these weak mortal human bodies. With that in mind, hope helps us now because we have something to expect for tomorrow.

In verse 19, Paul refers to the eager anticipation of creation. It describes the attitude of a person whose eyes scan the horizon in anticipation of the first signs of glory. Verse 24, Can we call what we are seeing and experiencing hope? Hope sees beyond what is tangible and easily discerned. As individuals, as a body of followers of Jesus Christ we have a hopeful vision not for where we are presently but for where God, through his Holy Spirit desires us to go. Paul refers, in Titus 2:13, to that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, for the follower of Jesus Christ, the best is yet to come.

Questions:

1. What frustrates you most about living in a fallen world? What is most difficult?
2. What is the difference between hope and wishful thinking?
3. In Romans 8:18-22 what is creation groaning about? What words does Paul use to describe the plight of creation?
4. What do believers groan over?
5. What are we waiting for? (verse 23)
6. How do verses 24, 25 help define what hope is all about? How does this get you through each day?