

The Certainty of Hope

This week we had somewhat of a win at the Space. Over the past month or so we have been looking to get a new dishwasher for the Space. Not exactly the most exciting piece of infrastructure I know, not compared to new lights, or sound systems, or helping our community but something essential. During the course of our search we managed to have a conversation with the new manager at Bunnings to try and purchase a dishwasher that had been in their cafe.

Turns out that all the equipment had been removed and they had taken it away. Any way the manager got us a contact who on initial conversation implied that as we had looked after the bunnings team by providing them with a room at a very generous rate that we could send them a list of items and if they had them we could have them free of charge.

Now at this point I started to get excited, this all sounded amazing, we had hoped to purchase a dishwasher and from what the guy was saying we could not only get a dishwasher but other equipment free of charge!!! Crazy right. Almost too good to be true.

I don't know what you are like but at this point, I decided let's not get our hopes up. Perhaps I heard wrong. It would be nice if it was true, but in reality it won't happen. So often we can take our hope and turn it into something more like a wish, something more like a longing than a reality or certainty.

Long story short this week Ande and Dave Mid [shout out to you guys] drove to Birmingham to pick up our new dishwasher along with around 10-12K pounds worth of equipment, and all it cost us was the diesel for the van!!!

It's incredible right. But how often are we more surprised when the things we hope for come true than when they don't.

If we aren't careful we can all end up treating the all important element of hope a bit like a wish. Here's what I mean.

We all believe in hope. We talk about hope; we promote hope. We shake our heads at people's sad stories and encourage them not to lose hope. There's nothing wrong with that - the church should be a beacon of hope, and of all people, Jesus followers should be proclaimers of hope.

But let's be honest. What good does it do for you to tell me to hope? We say things like "hope for the best" And I might think "How is hope going to help in my situation? Why is hope any better or more effective than a birthday wish?"

In and of itself, hope can't conquer discouragement. Hope has no inherent power to change our circumstances. Since when has hope done anything? Has hope ever grown arms and legs and saved us? Hope has no mystical powers. Why does hope deserve our hope?

We live in a society that proposes we all stay positive and hope for the best. I don't have a problem with that - I think being a positive person is great, I even envy people who are naturally positive and I would certainly rather hang around someone who is positive rather than a negative person. There is research and theories that imply positive thinking and speaking can directly improve our lives, for a variety of reasons. But positivity, hope and wishing on a star are not the answer. These things ultimately fall short, because hope in hope is no hope at all.

Hope is essential to us, it enables us to keep moving, to believe for more and for better things, to dream bigger dreams and live bigger lives. So where do we turn, where can we go for hope that is more than just wishful thinking? Hope that is solid, steadfast, hope that we can build our lives on?

Tonight I want to look at a letter written to a group of people called the Hebrews. At the time that this letter was written we find that this community of people are in a challenging time. This is a group of Jewish people who have chosen to follow Jesus, to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be, which was a polarizing decision on their part. This decision has caused them issues, they have been disowned by parents, they have lost siblings, been unfriended by their friends, ignored by co-workers and in some cases business owners have lost their livelihoods as people will not do business with them due to their beliefs.

This letter is delivered to people who choose to believe that Jesus was their saviour, they have nailed their colours to the mast that is Jesus, but they are now in a place where they are questioning the validity of Jesus' claims. They are wondering if this guy really was for real, they are exhausted and they are fatigued. They do not have a lot of money, they no longer have the friendship or social groups that they once had, their place within society has been drastically affected, things are becoming challenging and the writer offers them this encouragement;

Hebrews 6:13-20 (ESV)

¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, *in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement (great confidence / new courage) to hold fast to the hope set before us.* ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast (strong and trustworthy / real and true / unbreakable) anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The writer says “we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.....a HOPE”, we have hope, you have hope. Earlier in the letter the writer encourages us that we should have full assurance of hope, that we need to hope.

If today you are going through a discouraging time, if you are going through a challenging season, if you are feeling overwhelmed at work or in your home life, if you are feeling out of your depth relationally or financially I would encourage you in the same way as the writer...you need to hope, you need to hope. But the appropriate response for you would be where? How? And ultimately why? Why should I hope and in which direction should I hope? How should I hope? These are great questions.

The way that the writer answers these questions is steeped in Jewish imagery and metaphor. That's why for many of us reading this letter today, we read portions of these letters and if you are anything like me you just look at this and go huh!!! Inner place, curtain, forerunner, melch who?

But what the writer is establishing for these people who are wobbling in their faith, is that you have a hope, you have this hope which is this anchor which your soul (your innermost being) is attached to but listen your hope is Jesus, but not only that, look what Jesus has done for you. This is not simply hope in hope, this is hope in Jesus.

Did you know that nowhere in the biblical narrative is hope ever on it's own, which tells you about the nature of hope. 1 corinthians 13:13 says; Faith, hope AND love.

Hope isolated by itself is of no use, it has no power. Hope is always connected to faith, to love, to Jesus. Hope is never isolated and so it is true here, this hope, our hope, this sure, steadfast, true, real, strong hope is connected to Jesus.

If I can give you a quick rundown on Jesus...

Born in the back end of nowhere, in a place called Bethlehem. It's not London, New York, Tokyo, Sydney. It's not even Norwich, Wymondham, Dereham, Holt, Yarco or Sheringham. It's Swanton Novers, Bessingham, Bradfield, Bengate. Born in the countryside, in a place people paid no attention to. A place where people said nothing good would ever come from there.

Born in a cave filled with animals, to a virgin teenage girl and a carpenter father. They are the most average couple that you can find, except for the fact that they are giving birth to the living God. Jesus is born in a cave, surrounded by animals when mysteriously this group of shepherds, who are very low class, show up at the scene saying that angels told them to come here. If that wasn't strange enough a year or so later, some wise men / astronomers from the east appear, having followed a star and start worshipping Jesus.

At the age of 12, Jesus goes missing and is found in a church astounding the pastors and church leaders with His knowledge of the bible (reminder that bible's were not found in people's homes or as an app on your phone), and He reminds His parents that He is God and why would he be anywhere else.

We then see Him again at 30 years of age, where He has no plans to reveal His true identity (and we wonder where they got the idea for Superman) but His mum twists His arm and at a wedding He performs His first miracle of turning water into wine, and not just any wine, the best wine they have tasted at the entire wedding.

From there He gets 12 average, ordinary guys who role with Him, and together they grab the attention of the powers of the known world at this time. He dies this intense death, which He claims is on behalf of the sins of the people and yet He is never recorded once as ever doing anything wrong in His 33 years.

Whilst this is all going on not only does the sun get blocked out and the sky turns black, there is an earthquake and in the temple the very place where God is, the curtain which keeps everyone out and has kept

people out for 100 if not thousands of years, magically rips from top to bottom.

He is buried in a garden tomb, but they mysteriously can not find His body, so the government makes up fake news to say that the body had been stolen despite the presence of a large stone and a couple of guards in front of it.

Instead He raises from the dead and 100's of people claim to see Him. Then He levitates into heaven and disappears in the clouds, where He says He is ruling and reigning on behalf of all humanity.

But what does that mean for us? Put simply our hope is no longer anchored to our performance, as christians and humans we are famous for giving this impression, act right and you'll be alright. We anchor our hope for goodness, for favour and blessing from God on our performance. If I pray enough, if I give enough, if I go to church enough, if I do enough things and act correctly I will be blessed or liked by God and once again our hope is as fickle as our personal performance.

And so when we fail we lose hope. This is classic christians. If I fail then I lose hope. But that's not what the writer is saying, he is saying to these hebrew christians that we have a forerunner, that is a person that has gone ahead of us, and continues to go ahead of us, He prepares the way ahead and it's His performance that can continually give you the expectation of good in your life. Because when you do bad, you get good and that's the gospel.

Nobody is teaching this other than Jesus. You can do bad and get good, because Jesus is my forerunner, my life is no longer based on my performance but upon what Jesus accomplished on the cross. It seems absolutely preposterous, & totally unfair.

Surely if we tell people that they can do bad and get good, they'll simply continue to do bad. But in reality the reason that we continue to do bad is because we feel like we have dug ourselves in so deep, that it is impossible to get out, it's pointless to get out and it would take so much effort and work to get ourselves back to a proper place with God, what's the point in trying.

In reality this is the opposite of Jesus' message, at the moment that we simply believe in Jesus, we are made fully right before God, we have relationship with God, all of our shortcomings have been taken away, because he is our forerunner.

So the writer is saying to these Hebrew Christians, you have God's presence, God is no longer in one place but rather He is in you. Your hope is connected to His performance which is flawless and perfect.

And then he says that we have a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Now we need to understand the Hebrew mind. No one was greater than Melchizedek. Melchizedek is this mystery man that appears to Abraham and then he disappears and reappears in the writings of Psalms. Only twice is this mystery man appearing. He is something of a phantom, a legend to Jewish believers and what the writer is saying is that Jesus is even greater. As amazing as Melchizedek was, Jesus is even more awesome, not only that but there is no one greater than Jesus, Jesus is the boss, He is in charge.

And the word FOREVER is used, speaking of permanence, durability, dependability; continuity. If we can just begin to accept the foreverness of what Jesus has done, of what He has accomplished, of the dependability of what He has promised, that His presence is always with me, that His presence is anchored to His performance, and that he is permanently with you, for you, forgiven you and forgotten your sins. He is your provider of strength, He will not allow you be overwhelmed. He is your provider, physically and emotionally.

I love this imagery which the writer gives to us, anchor of the soul [IMAGE ON SCREEN - BAND]. In the metaphor that the writer provides, the boat is like your soul, the sea is just the unpredictable life that we live on this planet, and the anchor is what Jesus did for you. Now in this metaphor, who is holding who in this picture? The boat or the anchor? Now you could argue that they are both holding each other, but what is holding what more? Is the boat holding the anchor more or is the anchor holding the boat more?

When it comes to the message of hope, we as Christians are famous for saying 'hold on to hope', 'hold on - don't let go'. We have turned salvation into an anchor anchored in heaven with a rope dangling down to all of us earthlings for us to hold onto as tight as we can, everybody hold on. I believe in Jesus, I'm holding on, i'm getting tired, I forgot to hold on today, i got distracted today, and we think that this is why all these bad things are happening to us, because we can't hold on. If we could just get a better grip, just get a grip and things will be better for you.

Who is holding who? The anchor holds the boat on the surface of life. God has got you. Here is the thing about Jesus, you don't just anchor yourself to Jesus, He anchors himself to you and He grips on to your life. So what is our hope again?

My hope is that He is holding on so tight that when I forget to hold on, when I get tired of holding on, or when I don't want to hold on anymore, that He says, it's ok - I'm the anchor and you're the boat, I got you. IN that family situation, I got you. In your relationships, I got you. In your health, I got you. IN your pain, I got you and I won't let go.

Hebrews 6:9, talks about people who are falling away and it says these words;

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.

The writer goes on, let me tell you what's in your salvation package. One translation says; things which accompany salvation - salvation is not a dangling rope from heaven that you grip onto, salvation is God's grip on you.

I am sure beloved in your case that you're not going to fall away because God's got hold of you. That is my hope.
My hope is not in my strength,
my hope is not in my performance,
my hope is not in my accessing the presence of God,
my hope is not in my infrequent and nonpermanent lifestyle and choices,

my hope is His presence in me, His performance, His permanence and His grip on my life.

God is so big, He is so gracious, He is so loving, He put His hand on your life and He will not let go. You can not shake God that easily. He went to the cross for you, He died for you, He's forgiven you, He's forgotten your sins, it is not that easy to shake God. He will not let you sink. Hope on that.

Today, tonight, tomorrow as we return to our lives, as we face our reality I want to encourage you to hope on that. As the writer of this letter encouraged the hebrew christians, I encourage you HOPE on that. Hope on the certainty of His Presence in your life, Hope on the certainty of His flawless performance. Hope on the permanence of His promises to you and the grip He has on you.

It is so easy for us in the business of life, with so many things vying for our attention that we either forget to have hope or we get distracted from the hope which available to us.

Colossians 3:2 [NLT]

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honour at God's right hand. *Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.* For you died to this life [not my performance but His], and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

THINK about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

We must make a daily choice to have hope. Sometimes we just need to use our mouths to remind ourselves that we are in the grip of God, to focus our minds on the realities of heaven. To make a conscious effort, to set our sights, whether it's at the start of the day as we walk out of our homes, in the car, on a bus, or walking into our realities, we must make the choice of where to look. In the midst of our internal dialogue sometimes we just need to stop and to hope.

I can stop it, it's not about you, it's not about your performance, shake it off, step up. In the psalms King David did this all the time, he would remind his soul, this isn't about my performance, this isn't about my deeds, this isn't about my strength, it is not by my might or power but rather the strength of God, that is holding me.

We've got to do this. This is real life. We need to constantly remind ourselves that this is our hope. That whatever we are going through, that God has got you, He hasn't let go, this will pass, He has more for you. Your tomorrow is coming, and it is better than the past. Today I want to encourage you Hope on God.