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Presentation Transcript
Faith and Hope - The Faithful Christian Part 6
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Paul said that faith, hope and love were the three greatest Christian attributes. He also said that “faith is the evidence of things hoped for.” That’s a quote from the King James Bible. This tells us that there is a close connection between faith and hope, and I hope to explore that connection today as the sixth in our series on faith – *The Faithful Christian*.

When people come to my office for counseling, I ask them, “What are you hoping for?” And they say things like, “I want to get over my depression,” “I want to get over my anxiety,” “I want to figure out how to deal with my husband,” “I want to be at peace,” “I want to sleep better.” Most of the people that come to my office have tried to accomplish these things on their own, and they’re not sure they can happen because they have not been successful, but they are hopeful.

I told the story, I think, a couple years ago at the Festival, about a young lady that came to my office. She had terrible, crippling anxiety – trouble sleeping and lots of problems with that. I was explaining to her what anxiety is and how we deal with that, using EMDR. She was intently focused on me, listening. And as she listened, she reached over, without taking her eyes off me, and took a tissue, and started dabbing her eyes. And I said, “What are those tears for?” And she said, “I’m just hopeful.” She’d been struggling with this for so long, to even learn that there might be a chance she could get past it was a very emotional thing for her.

So you remember my story, too, about my friend that asked God to give him a watch in a red box. Sometimes we hope for some change we want to see. Sometimes we hope for physical things. Sometimes we hope for help and other material needs or wants. We can hope for snow or rain, or lack of them. The hope for snow here usually comes in the early part of winter, then the latter part of winter, we’re ready to move one and we don’t want to see any more snow.

Not long after Elaine and I graduated, and got married, and moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, we were leaving Wednesday night Bible study at the YWCA in downtown Little Rock – not the best

neighborhood. And I had my hands full, and I was trying to unlock the car and get all our stuff in it. And I put Elaine's Bible on the roof of the car, so that I could do all that. And then I drove off with the Bible on top of the car. Well, it fell off – probably fairly soon – and we lost it. Now this Bible was not just your average Bible. It was a leather-bound, Oxford, India paper, wide-margin Bible – wide-margin so that she could put her notes in it – and the finest India paper – very thin, so even though it was a large Bible, because of the one-inch margins all around, it wasn't as thick as a lot of Bibles we see, because the paper was so thin. The leather binding was just beautiful. We still have leather-bound Bibles, from thirty years ago, that are in perfect condition. So that was probably about 1969 when that happened. And I think that Bible cost her a hundred dollars, even back then. So that could be like a two hundred dollar, two hundred and fifty dollar book, based on inflation, today. So that was a loss. But worse yet, it had all of Elaine's notes from college – from Bible classes, chain references, all kinds of notes – personal things that she wanted to remember. So this Bible wasn't just a two hundred and fifty dollar book. It was a part of life. It was a real tool that she used every day. She took notes, quite frequently, about things from sermons and all that, and it was just an amazing tool for her. So, you can imagine how I felt. I spent a lot of time beating myself up over that. And the thing that finally came to my mind was, it just didn't make sense that God would allow this Bible to stay lost forever, in spite of my absent-minded mistake that I made. Of course, I didn't, at that time, understand that God doesn't always think the way I think. But we prayed, and sometime after I'd given up praying – I don't remember how long it was – was it two weeks? A month? Two months? – quite a while – a call came from the Little Rock police department. Someone had turned this Bible in and would Elaine like to have her Bible back? So we started talking about it, and I discovered that Elaine *hadn't* given up. She was still praying about it.

So God has not promised to give back lost Bibles anywhere in the Bible. He has made no such specific promise, but He does tell us that He will take care of us. And He does tell us that He loves us, and that He gives us good gifts. So he bailed me out on that one, and more importantly, He gave Elaine her Bible back, which was so important to her.

So those are all interesting things that we pray about and that we hope for, but there's another category of things hoped for, besides physical things and miscellaneous needs that we have. The two categories that we've already talked about are things or changes that anyone could hope for. You don't have to be a Christian to hope for those things. But the Bible talks about an entirely different area of "hope fors" – the things Christians hope for, besides all the other things that we need in daily life. And it's in this area that we want to focus on today.

Christians can hope for eternal life with God, because it's a promise made to us in the Bible. We can hope for this spiritual inheritance, which is salvation, and we can hope for deliverance from sin. And we can hope for these things for ourselves and for others. We can hope for the Father and the Son to come into us and live their lives in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can hope to be forgiven of the sins that we have committed. And we can hope for a change of heart – from selfishness to love. We can hope that God will help us overcome sins that we currently are

burdened with. We can hope for a better record of obedience going forward. We can hope for the day when we see God and realize what it means to be like Him. We can hope for the return of Jesus. We can hope for the binding of Satan. We can hope for the thousand years on earth, where everyone knows God. And we can hope for the new heaven and earth, where there's no more sun, and we are illuminated by the light of the Father.

So there's one major difference between all these things and that first category that we mentioned. The first one is comprised of things we want to see happen that are personal, and the second one contains things God has promised us. And so that is where faith comes in.

Paul told us in Hebrews 11:1 – we've read this, I think, in almost every one of the sermons in this series:

Hebrews 11:1 – *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

So no one has seen God yet. So we don't know exactly what it will be like when we are like Him. It's something that we hope for. And faith is the belief that we will see Him and be like Him. So faith is what causes us to live our lives as though we know that all these things are going to come to us. Let me say that again. Faith is what causes us to live our lives as though we know these things are coming to us.

Just as an example, I'm getting older. I'm seventy-three now. When I was fifty, I didn't think much about the fact that I wouldn't be around forever. But I think more and more about that as I start to lose some of my capabilities. I realize I *am* getting older. But I'm still living my life as though I'm going to live forever with God. And that is because I believe that's what's going to happen. And that knowledge that comes to me, that is from faith. We don't know it by any physical evidence. All the physical evidence seems to point to the contrary. We're getting older. But we know it by faith.

Paul said something else about hope as well in Romans 8:24:

Romans 8:24 – *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* You know, when I'm born into God's eternal family, I won't have to hope for that anymore, because it will be reality. Right? That's what he's saying. So the fact that we're hoping for it proves we haven't received it yet. And, if we are already like God, it would not need to be hoped for, and we would not need faith to receive it. So hope is about the future. It's what we're hoping for. Right?

So let's look at the context of these two sentences to see a bigger picture. I pulled that out of context to make the point, but there's a bigger picture that Paul is talking about. It's in Romans 8 – we'll start in verse 18. He said:

V-18-19 – *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* Now Paul said that the sufferings of this present time.... You know, this man was stoned a number of times. He was shipwrecked, and spent – was it? – a night and a day in the sea. Think about that. He faced wild beasts in the coliseum at Ephesus. He had something wrong with him that he couldn't get rid of that was a problem – his “thorn in the flesh.” He was resisted by many of the people in his own congregations over and over again. As he traveled, he had difficulties. Traveling wasn't like getting on a jet plane, and four hours later, being halfway across your country. It was walking. So this man *suffered* a lot – a lot more than we've ever suffered, I think. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* So he said, “It's all worth it!” *For the creation* – now he expands it. *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* So the whole creation was all created to cause God's plan to take place – to happen – and His children to be revealed. Then he says:

V-20-21 – *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly* – not that we asked for it – *but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* You know, we look at the universe, we look at the night sky, and we're dumbfounded at the hugeness of it and the beauty. And yet, what is the futility he's talking about? Well, he's talking about the fact that the physical universe is finite. It's not going to last forever. We know that the sun is running out of fuel and so is every other star that we can look at in the night sky. In fact, many of them that we're seeing, have already burned out because it takes the light from them so long to get to us. But it's not just the physical nature of the universe – the finite nature of it – that he's talking about. He's talking about how God subjected it to human free will and to the free will of the devil. And the sense, then, is that the whole creation has been waiting and longing for the revealing of God's children, and the change in the physical creation that's going to take place. It's not just that *our* bodies are corrupt and are going to vanish. It's that the entire creation is just physical, and that one day, it's going to away, too, and be replaced by something much, much better. ... *obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* The physical creation is, like us, going to be changed into something eternal. And it says: ... *the creation was subjected to futility in hope.* Whose hope? Well yes, *God* is hoping for something here. Paul called God the God of hope, because in working His plan – it has not yet come to fruition – and so it's something that He's hoping for. Everything we hope for is going to come true, but it still hasn't come true yet. Paul explained that already.

You know, when I first read that, years ago, I thought Paul meant that God was the God who *gives hope*, and He *is*. But also, He has a great hope Himself, as well. All these things He hopes for are not yet reality.

I gave a sermon at the Feast at Fort Walton Beach this year, about how God allows us to suffer in order to mold us into the perfect beings that He wants us to be. And I wish that I had thought to include this scripture, because it certainly would have added some context. See, it's not just me,

or you, who suffers. Because of what the devil did in the Garden, the entire planet and all the people of it have been subjected to the futility of sin. Let's read on in verse 22:

V-22-25 – *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* He likens this whole thing as a process of childbirth, because we're going to be *born* into God's Kingdom. So there are pains that the whole creation is going through, and has from its beginning. You know, we talk about pain, and we all have to suffer, and how terrible that is, and we know that the pain of childbirth is one of the greatest pains people feel, and yet, there is something *good* coming from it. That's the lesson that we have about the misery and the things that we have to go through. *We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope* – there's the part that I read already. *For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* And what is it that gives us the patience to do that? Well, it's faith. There's that connection between hope and faith.

What happens when God gives us hope and faith? Well, in Romans 15:13, he says:

Romans 15:13 – *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing....* What is it when we believe in something God has promised, but has not yet given us? Well, it's called faith. So, *may the God of hope fill you will all joy and peace in believing....* If we have faith in God and strong hope, then that means that we can be joyful and peaceful. We can watch the news at night, and watch all the ugliness, and the lying, and the hypocrisy, and the inconsistencies, and the ridiculousness that goes on among our politicians and many of us, just as the citizens. And we can have joy and peace, because we *know* that this is just all part of the birth pangs, and that eventually all of us are going to be revealed as the children of God. *May the God of hope fill you will all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.* What does he mean "abound in hope?"

Let's step aside for a second. This presentation is about faith, but it's also about how faith and hope interact. And I would like to propose something for you to think about. We are often encouraged in the Bible and by our friends and relatives to have faith. But, if what we are having faith in is weak, or not there, then the power of faith is diminished. And when that happens, we need to increase our hope. How do we do that? Well, we focus our minds on the promises God has made to us.

My wife has a notebook. It's not in her Bible, because it's too big to put in the margins of her Bible. But she has a book that she's made up over the years of all the promises that God has made to us. Every time she finds one in the Bible, she writes it in her book. That's so that when she gets discouraged, or tired, or feels a lack of faith, or has some big trial, she can go to her book of promises. That has to increase her hope, because the things that we hope for from God

are promises that He's made to us. That's why we can have hope about it.

I have this sort of comic experience in my mind from back in college days. It has to do with my friend and my weight-lifting coach, Harry Schneider, who, sadly, is now deceased. Harry helped me learn to compete in weight-lifting in college. He was older than I was, but he was a student, too. He had a gift for coaching. I remember when I was working out for one of my competitions, I hit a sticking point while I was bench pressing, I think. There were people watching and Harry was there. When I hit that sticking point, I heard him say to somebody else, "He's got it!" And the weight just popped up. It was like he knew just what to say to get the maximum out of the people he was coaching. And he was a great athlete himself. He didn't compete in the competition that we had – he would have won it all – but he had a problem with one of his hips. He had a steel rod that ran down his femur up into his pelvis to hold it steady, because his hip was destroyed by osteomyelitis. He was Latvian and at the end of World War II, his mother threw him out of a two-story window down to his father, because they were fleeing from the Russians. And his father dropped him and bruised his hip severely, and I think, may have broken his pelvis. He never exhibited any self-pity. He was a great athlete, in spite of that. So, it's the night before the big competition – I'm using the word *big* in a sort of tongue-in-cheek kind of way. I mean, how big could it be – a weight-lifting competition isn't exactly the most popular sport in the world – at a college with 500 students? I think there were three guys in my weight class. That said, I walked into Mayfair – one of the men's dorms – and saw, sitting at his desk, Harry. And he had some sort of tan powder smeared all over his face. And I said, "What's up? What are you doing?" And he showed me a gigantic tin of protein powder, which he was cramming into his mouth by hand – it appeared, by the fistful – and said, "Bulking up for the big competition" – not that eating protein powder the night before would help any, I suppose – but I laughed, and I said – tongue-in-cheek – "Onward toward the Kingdom!" – which was meant to be a joke. And he looked at me in all seriousness, and said, "Nothing else matters." Everything Harry did was, in some way, connected to the Kingdom of God. That's how he thought about it.

I've noticed that Eastern European people have a way like that. In our country, when a young couple gets married, the reason they want to have children is because they want to have children. It's because of the biological imperative. But in Eastern Europe – in the Ukraine, and the western Soviet Union, and I suppose, in Latvia, too – the reason people have children – Christian people – is to grow the Church of God. That's why they do it. It's always about the Kingdom. So while the rest of us were trying to get that connection, Harry already had it.

You know, nobody can stay down for long with that kind of focus. If you ever get discouraged, or depressed, or have the blahs, get out your Bible, and start reading about all the things that God has promised His children. Think about all the things that we've talked about already in this sermon and *focus* on them, and *hope* for them. And then you'll have something to have faith about. Once we have the goal firmly in mind, carried into our hearts by the Father and the Son living in us, then faith kicks in to make those promises real. And that causes us to love. And love causes action. But more on that next time, in our seventh and final presentation in this series, *The Faithful Christian*.

Don't forget to checkout our Website, liferesource.org – lots of good stuff there.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.