

SERMON NOTES

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LORD, HOW GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS. That's how it began today, featuring lyrics saturated in hope, which indeed fully set our hearts on fire for Jesus! And that was the point: *Through it all You've been so good. Your mercies are new every morning. You have kept Your word like you said you would!* To set things further ablaze, Lance and Pastor Marc took center stage with an especially joy-filled announcement referencing CCO's BACK TO SCHOOL BASH. This moment excelled mere announcement; it was filled with a contagious joy which easily led us into a robust version of Blessed Assurance, complete with deep blue stained glass imaging across the back screen, which, in turn, was followed by a contemporary version of the beloved hymn: Blessed assurance. Jesus is mine! *This is my story. This is my song. I trust in God my Savior, the Author of tomorrow. I SOUGHT THE LORD AND HE HEARD AND HE ANSWERED. THAT'S WHY I TRUST HIM!* We were then blessed with Pastor Tara announcing the beginning of a new series for CCO's children, which features how the Bible is true and the importance of being rooted in God's Word. Basic. Foundational. An awesome roadway into the hearts of CCO's children!

Habakkuk 3:19 NIV

The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

CCO's stage had changed somewhat, featuring a tall ladder leaning upon the screen. We were immediately drawn into today's message as a black and white, somewhat overwhelming, image of turbulent waves at sea served as background to today's series: **HOPE IN THE DARK**. *I am redirecting today's message, said Pastor Paul, from casting future directions for CCO, which I had referenced last week, to rather address what's happening all around us and our desperate need for HOPE.*

We serve a sovereign God. We need to listen precisely to what He is saying, indeed what His Word has to say, addressing all the hopelessness which surrounds us: senseless murders in Charlotte, NC to the Ukraine war with Russia, evil's capture of school children and the assassination of Charlie Kirk.

Everything is so heavy now. Society in general is heavy. Access the latest news through social media or otherwise and you'll see the weight of it all. We are surrounded and cannot help but be affected by it all. We need HOPE to combat the heaviness, to say the least! Now hope is not wishful thinking. It is not about the heavy traffic on I-4 or other related issues. Hope is rather filled with tension while maintaining hope in a hopeless society. Don't be overwhelmed by the world. THERE IS HOPE!

INSIGHT: Christian hope is not a mere wish but a confident, certain expectation of future good based on God's promises and the historical reality of Jesus Christ's resurrection. It's an anchor for the soul, providing strength and perseverance through suffering by anticipating God's eternal love, the new heavens and earth, and Christ's glorious return to restore all things. This theological virtue is rooted in God's character, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and inseparable from faith and love, shaping every aspect of a believer's life. Key Aspects of Christian Hope include the following.

- **It is confident expectation:**

The Greek word for hope, *elpis*, signifies a strong, confident expectation rather than a mere wish.

- **It is Christ-centered:**
Christian hope is fundamentally about Jesus Christ—His death for sins, His resurrection for justification, and His future return to restore the world.
- **It is grounded in God's promises:**
It is a firm belief in the truth of God's word and His promises, especially the promise of eternal life and a restored creation.
- **It is life-shaping:**
This hope transforms how Christians view and respond to suffering, disappointment, and temptation, giving them resources to persevere.
- **It is a theological virtue:**
Hope, along with faith and love, is an essential virtue for believers, empowering them with joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.
- **It provides perspective on suffering:**
Christians are encouraged to face suffering with the knowledge that God intends it for good, leading to spiritual strength and maturity.
- **It anticipates future glory:**
The ultimate hope is the eternal love and glory of God, the new creation, and the resurrection of believers to be with Him forever.

THERE IS HOPE! **HOPE IN JESUS!**

Have you ever placed your hope in someone or somewhere or a promise (until death do us part) or a job, finding that ultimately such hope, your hope was smashed into pieces? Know that hope itself is filled with tension; such tension has to do with maintaining hope.

CONSIDER THIS:

- Maintaining hope is essential in life.
- Consider the plight of an athlete with a broken leg. What happens next?
- Consider a pianist with an onslaught of arthritis. What happens next?
- Consider a family with wayward adult children. What happens next?

When things that we have leaned on, and perhaps have fully trusted have been dashed against the *rocks*, when hope has disappeared, we question our *abilities* to deal with life's challenges, and we suddenly wonder why in

the world should I even try or, even worse, why pray? **WE NEED TO RETAIN OUR HOPE.** Here's how.

First, HOPE IS LIKE A LADDER (life) leaned against a wall or something or someone whom or which we know will come through for us. Where do you lean your ladder? On parents? On your decisions? On your goodness? On things you thought were right? On politics or political party? On teachers? Clergy? Others? On school? On work? On your boss? On children? On that next move? Or house? Or job? Or finances? Here we unfortunately set ourselves up for thorough disappointment and loss of hope. Remember, upon *whom* or what our ladder leans is crucial!

Everything in our world is broken and imperfect all around us. Around ALL of us! Still, hope is possible!

1 Timothy 6:17 NIV

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, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Psalms 33:20,22 NIV

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. [22] May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

When all is said and done, we need to trust God. We must have every confidence in our heavenly Father. **OUR LADDER HAS TO LEAN ON GOD HIMSELF.**

**PUT YOUR HOPE
IN JESUS ALONE!**

CONSIDER THIS:

- My hope is not in government.
- My hope is not in political party.
- My hope is not in finances.
- My hope is not in others,
- My hope is not in what possessions I have.

- My hope is not in my latest acquirement.
- My only real hope is HOPE IN JESUS!

HOPE IS THE DOORWAY INTO MY FUTURE!

Romans 8:20 NIV

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope.

At this point I took a hard look at what stared back at me from the stage screen: dark, ominous waves at sea. If I remained in that space any longer, I thought I might sink, but God had something in else store, something which easily captured what Pastor Paul was saying. (Next week, take a long look at the horizon in that turbulent image.) Close to the horizon's center is what I see as two vertical bright white sails, something God has called me to see, to apply, to vitalize my hope in Him, to understand that He is the only one who is able to give me a lasting FOREVER HOPE. He alone rescues me! I blinked several times. The image remained! For me, the sails symbolize the hope I find in Jesus and it is a hope available to all who would seek Him. Jesus alone is our hope! He is the One who saves me! He rescues us! He says, *Climb aboard! All will be well. You'll see!*

Why are we in our present broken condition? Note that Paul was writing Romans when Nero was emperor. It actually seems the world in Paul's time, if you can imagine it, was in many ways worse off than we are now! Paul gives us important insight on how to live life. As followers of Jesus. We need to reflect on why politics, family, children are in such broken condition. WE HAVE INHERITED THE DNA OF HUMANITY ever since sin entered in! Sin is tightly woven into the fabric of our lives. Still, there is an amazing hope available!

LEAN UPON GOD ALONE. IN HIM IS OUR FOREVER HOPE!

Unfortunately, we all have inherited sin's DNA. Sin now is in its *full* course. Of course, we *hope* that creation will be liberated. Know that there is a freedom and glory promised! LEAN YOUR HOPE ON GOD ALONE!

Romans 8:22 NIV

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

We groan for a better life. We groan for release from our frustrations. Consider the next hope-filled scripture.

Romans 8:24 NIV

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

God has a plan and even now is working His plan out! What is our response to this good news? ***If God is for us, who can be against us?***

Romans 8:31 NIV

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Always remember that God gave it all for us! God cares about what troubles us, what challenges us and all the things and issues and people who stand against us. He has a plan of HOPE and SALVATION. There is hope in His Son. Ask yourself: *What am I going to lean my ladder on?* Hopefully, Jesus.

INSIGHT: Romans 8:31, which asks "If God is for us, who can be against us?", is a rhetorical question from the Apostle Paul emphasizing that no opposition, whether from people, circumstances, or even spiritual forces, can ultimately defeat or separate a believer from God's love and plan for them in Christ. It's a declaration of absolute security in God's power and unwavering commitment to His chosen people, assuring them of their victory and God's constant presence and support throughout all trials and hardships.

Key Aspects of Romans 8:31:

- **Rhetorical Question:** The question isn't seeking an answer but is a powerful statement that implies the answer is "no one".

- **God's Support is Absolute:** It stems from the conviction that God, who is on the believer's side, is the ultimate power in the universe.
- **Focus on God's Plan:** Paul is referring to the preceding verses that describe God's eternal plan and purpose for believers, including His foreknowledge, calling, justification, and glorification.
- **Ultimate Victory:** The verse highlights the idea that believers have already won in God's economy because God has overcome all obstacles for them.
- **Confidence and Hope:** It provides assurance and encouragement for Christians to face life's difficulties with confidence, knowing that God's strength will prevail over their weakness and that nothing can truly harm their relationship with Him.

In the Context of Romans 8:31-39

Romans 8:31 serves as a transition into a series of powerful rhetorical questions that follow. These questions address and negate any potential fears, fears of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or the sword, as well as other things that could threaten to separate believers from God's love. The ultimate message is that God's unwavering, unconditional love is so powerful that nothing can sever believers from it.

God hears our prayers. What will we say in response to the hopelessness of the world? Are we ready to give witness to what God clearly says about HOPE in Scripture? Are you ready not only to share about hope but boldly press into God's heart for His hope? Again, explore the following citation.

Romans 8:31 NIV

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

A basic question continues within the midst of life: *What am I going to lean my ladder (life) on?* Hopefully, our answer will be **JESUS!** Never lean on political parties, government, others, education, finances, jobs. Lean on Jesus alone! Unfortunately, some lean their ladders on wrong things.

Note that all of us continue to walk in the world's toxic malaise of hopelessness. We do not have to get caught up in such misery though. Here are some guides as to where we can find hope.

WAYS TO FIND HOPE

1. OUR HOPE IS IN CHRIST ALONE.

- 1 Peter 1:3 NIV
- **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**
- Our Lord offers us a living hope because He is our living Savior.
- CCO stresses in its mission that ***there is no hope except in Jesus alone.***
- We are called to completely love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. HOPE SUSTAINS US IN TIMES OF SUFFERING.

- Romans 5:3-5 AMP
- ***And not only this, but [with joy] let us exult in our sufferings and rejoice in our hardships, knowing that hardship (distress, pressure, trouble) produces patient endurance; [4] and endurance, proven character (spiritual maturity); and proven character, hope and confident assurance [of eternal salvation]. [5] Such hope [in God's promises] never disappoints us, because God's love has been abundantly poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.***
- Hope is NOT a result of an easy life.
- Hope comes about in spite of hard circumstances.
- Take courage. Believers, take courage!

3. HOPE MUST BE SHARED WITH A HURTING WORLD.

- 1 Corinthians 13:13 AMP
- ***And now there remain: faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God's love for me], these three [the choicest graces]; but the greatest of these is love.***
- Consider CCO's odd location. Ever asked why we are here in this location?

- Orlando is a major crossroads of the world.
- Orlando is a *mishmash* of belief systems, religions, politics, walks of life, human backgrounds, preferred ways of *doing* life, and a full spectrum of confirmed atheists all the way over to Christian born-again believers.
- God placed CCO here to literally bear the image of Christ to others.
- To call others to faith in Jesus as personal Lord and Savior.
- To encourage others to lean their life-ladders on Jesus alone.
- People need to hear about the hope we, as believers, have received.
- CCO is not about church per se; it is primarily about JESUS.

EXAMPLE: Yes, people need to hear about the amazing hope found in Jesus alone! To this end, Pastor Paul presented a moving video of a CCO sister's testimony. Although an active Roman Catholic who attended church regularly, she had been moved to ask God years ago to lead her to a church which would set her heart on fire! She had experienced many seasons of life, some difficult, others easy. She sought seasons which would contain no judgment. She had a daughter who now knows Jesus, a sweet child who often dedicates her original songs to God! What an active love for God which now ministers to her mother and others as well. In a critical time of her life, Pastor Paul and the fellowship of CCO was there for her and for this she will remain forever grateful. So, for our sister in Christ, life at CCO changed her. CCO has become home for her, a great place to raise a child. At this, there came encouraging applause! *People need to know God!* she said. And with this the precious moving testimony concluded.

Yes, indeed, people need to know God! We must lean our life-ladder upon Jesus alone. There are no substitutions!

There is an AWAKENING coming about. I just know it. Even in last week's dark despair, I recall Charlie Kirk's continual pointing to Jesus for answers because Jesus is the ANSWER. You can see it, can't you? Especially after Charlie's assassination, God is up to something. Get ready to be amazed. Take a look at 40,000 gathered for a vigil in Los Angeles, CA or thousands drawing together in London or the hundreds of thousands throughout the world, aware of what has happened, driven closer to God and his call upon each of us. Here, God is building upon a devastating and hurtful event; He is busy turning and pointing the assassination itself, beyond the hurt, into to something good. There is an AWAKENING.

Upon the hope of Jesus we must lean our life-ladders. As Pastor Paul said today: ***At CCO we craft everything here to make Jesus visible!***

On October 19th CCO will present its second **SODO STREET FESTIVAL**, 11am-1pm. Literally, we will *get into the streets*. We will proclaim Jesus. We will share His gospel through witness, gospel music, food and sweet fellowship. Our witness will be clear, bold, and compelling. Join us. Bring friends. Make this event known throughout our city.

We have a choice. Jesus put it simply: ***Do you choose life or death?*** Hope enables us to get beyond the darkness of the world. Yes, we literally do have a choice: **DON'T JUST CURSE THE DARKNESS. BE THE LIGHT!**

Psalm 33:20,22 NIV

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. [22] May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

With this, as the hope of Jesus filled our hearts, an impassioned time of prayer and call to salvation took place. Pastor Paul, on fire for Jesus, led us powerfully into the very presence of Jesus, step by step, where hope resides, alive, fierce and unashamed. Here is where we need to go, to the very heart of Jesus Himself, to His heart which bled and died and rose again, just for you, just for me, to be the light in this old world of ours. *Things will be well. In God's perfect timing.* This is today's message. It is our hope.

In summary, Biblical hope is not wishful thinking, but a confident, unwavering expectation of future good based on God's character, promises, and work particularly the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a secure anchor for the soul in the face of suffering, a gift from God through the Holy Spirit, and a motivation to live a holy life, anticipating a future with God that is guaranteed by His unfailing love.

Today's clear and passionate message opened many hearts as, once again, our Lord boldly stood within our praise.

I give You glory
For all You've brought me through
And now I'm ready
For whatever You want to do

I'm moving forward
To follow after You
And now I'm ready
For whatever You want to do

Your presence
Is an open door
We want You Lord like never
before