

Should We Really Have Hope?  
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(2 Corinthians 4:13-18 NRSV)

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture--" I believed, and so I spoke"--we also believe, and so we speak, {14} because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. {15} Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. {16} So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. {17} For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, {18} because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

(2 Corinthians 4:13-18 The Message)

We're not keeping this quiet, not on your life. Just like the psalmist who wrote, "I believed it, so I said it," we say what we believe. And what we believe is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up with you, alive. Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise!

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

Kinda hard to have hope these days.

Close to 4,000 US soldiers have died in Iraq and there is no end in sight. Instead it appears that we are posturing to enter a war with Iran.

Gas prices have gone over \$3.00 a gallon, and everything I read says that they are just beginning to climb — one article I saw suggested that \$4.00 a gallon will be a reality before the year is out.

The stock market saw a 350 point drop on Thursday.

Close to ½ million homes are in foreclosure.

Talk of global warming and it's cataclysmic effects on our future.

How does one have hope with all of that going on?

Two weeks ago, I woke up to find my car window smashed and my camera stolen — From in front of my house — in my driveway!

How does one have hope with all of that going on?

John Peterson, of the W. Alton Jones Foundation writes this:

"A hundred or more novel chemicals are swilling around in our bloodstream, chemicals which, before this century, were not found in human beings. It makes all of us, as well as our children and grandchildren, a walking experiment - one with completely unknown results."

Or have you been reading all the scientists recently about the changes in our climate, and the increasing frequency of strange weather whether it be hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, or volcanic eruptions?

Tornado — In Napanee — In October?

I even saw a cartoon recently where two planets are passing each other. One asks the other, "How are you?" It replies: "I'm not very well, I've got Homo Sapiens." The first planet replies: "Oh, don't worry. It will soon pass."

So, How do we find hope?

Did you listen to Paul this morning?

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often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

What kind of hope is Paul talking about?

A hope that nothing will go wrong?  
No, I don't think so.

Julian of Norwich once wrote:  
"God did not say,  
    'You will not be troubled,  
    you will not be belabored,  
    you will not be disquieted;'  
but God said: 'You will not be overcome.'"

Was Paul talking about the kind of hope that means we will be blessed richly?

Robert Schuller said memorably in his autobiography, *My Journey*:  
"You can go anywhere from nowhere. My life is witness to that. I was born at the dead end of a dirt road that had no name and no number - in a flood."

That certainly is the hope that we proclaim as Americans — what we might call the American dream — but this isn't the hope that Paul is speaking of.

The hope that Paul is speaking of is a hope that is grounded and rooted in the love and presence of Jesus in our lives.

A hope that will sustain us and nurture us through the good times and the bad.

A hope that will enable us to grow in our discipleship for Jesus

This hope of grace is a gift of God's love and kindness.

Or as the early church father Ignatius put it,  
"Let us not be lacking in feeling for (God's) kindness, for if (God) were to imitate our way of action, then we would exist no more" (Magnesians 10.1).

Samuel Rutherford, who three hundred years ago, was locked up by the King of England, because he challenged the king and his theology. While he was in prison in Aberdeen wrote letters to his congregation, offering to them encouragement in the face of difficult wrote:

"I see grace groweth best in winter"

Christianity is really the story of grace that grows best in winter.

A couple weeks ago I reminded you of that great Dickens story: A Tale of Two Cities. In that classic work is the story of Sydney Carton, who changed clothes with Evremonde in the prison.

Just before his head was chopped off in the guillotine, some of the most famous last words in fiction were uttered by him:

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it's a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known."

The interesting thing is, many of us remember that story from fiction — but why don't we know this story from history?

Have any of you ever hear of Alban? Alban, was a Roman-Briton Christian who was caught up in one of Dioceltian's murderous rampages against the Christians around the year 209.

Alban schemed to change clothes with a priest marked for death, so the priest could continue spreading the name of Jesus through the countryside and escape Dioceltian's soldiers.

In the midst of the winter of our lives, God offers to us the opportunity to grow in hope.

But the question is the same one that I left you with a couple of weeks ago — how do you perceive the world?

Is it a good place

Or is it a place that is inherently evil

The answer to that question makes a huge difference in the hope that we have.

Which is your creed?

Woody Allen's:

"More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One

path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

Or D. Christian Larson's

"Be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.  
Talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person you meet.  
Make all your friends feel there's something in them.  
Look at the sunny side of everything.  
Think only of the best, work only for the best, and expect only the best.  
Be as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.  
Forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.  
Give everyone a smile.  
Spend so much time improving yourself that you have no time left to criticize others.  
Be too big for worry and too noble for anger."

It was a hot June morning, two days until — what would have been Stewart's 26<sup>th</sup> birthday (he had died a year and a half earlier) — Nancy wasn't feeling real good so we headed off to the doctor, it was almost an hour drive from our house to the doctor's office.

When we saw the doctor, he said that today was the day — but not yet. Go, walk the mall and come back in a couple of hours. We went to Scottsdale Mall, and at one point, I turned around and Nancy was gone — all I could hear in my panicking head was (coming over the loud speaker) "Woman giving birth in aisle three"

When I found Nancy again, I said — we've done enough shopping, time to go to the hospital.

A couple hours later — a beautiful girl was born.

The doctor asked us: what name we were going to give her.

Nancy said Jessica

And before I knew it, out of my mouth came JESSICA HOPE

Every time that I get down — I think of the miracle of her birth and am reminded that we must always have hope in the world.

So, which is your creed?

That the world is a horrible place

or

That life is a gift, and through the gift of God's love, we can make the world even better!

Should we have hope in the world — YES