

Jesus is our (*lively*) Hope

Sermon notes by Pastor John Longwell, preached at Revive Church, Rio Rancho, NM on December 1, 2019. More info at <https://JohnLongwell.com>

Opening prayer: I pray each of you would grasp one small gift from this message from the Spirit of God to you! May that gift transform your life through God's holy Word.

As the holidays are now upon us we enter a season where thoughts turn toward giving. Stats tell us that 30% of annual charitable donations are received during the month of December and 10% of all annual donations during the last 3 days of the year (have to get that charitable contribution in for the taxman).

Kids complete their wish list for gifts they hope they'll receive. This brings us to two interesting words, *wish* and *hope*. We use "wish" for hypothetical things in the past or present that we would like to be different. Like "I *wish* the Cowboys hadn't lost on Thanksgiving. We use "hope" for things with a future meaning that have a possibility of coming to pass. Like "I *hope* the Saints win the Superbowl!" I've hoped for the last couple of years that I would wake up on Christmas morning and find a Lamborghini parked in my garage. In reality, because this is more of a hypothetical possibility, I should say I "wish" I could wake up on Christmas morning to find a Lamborghini in my garage. Just like we should say I "wish" the Cowboys would make it to the Superbowl this year, whereas we can "hope" the Saints will make it to the Superbowl because this is a more realistic possibility.

The Bible speaks of *hope* in a variety of verses.

Proverbs 13:12 (ESV) Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

When we set our hearts on something and it doesn't come to pass, or when it's coming is delayed, we become disappointed and despair. In contrast, when a desire does come to pass we rejoice!

The Bible speaks of *hope* as the very substance of our faith. Hebrews 11:1 (ESV) proclaims, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hebrews 11:1-3 (NKJV) states, “Now faith is the substance (or the realization) of things hoped for, the evidence (or confidence) of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

We apply our faith (or the confidence of the things we hope for) to the best gift we’ve ever received, our gift of salvation. We know it’s a gift because John 3:16 (ESV) says, “For God so loved the world, that he **gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The best aspect of salvation’s gift is yet to be enjoyed, you know that whole eternal life part, yet we rest secure in the hope that it is real.

Romans 8:24-25 (ESV) relates, “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

We hope peacefully for an eternity in Christ after we die (we need not be anxious or uneasy) because God reassures us daily of His presence and provision.

Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV) “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

James 4:8 (ESV) “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV) “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency (or contentment) in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

The Bible proclaims that Jesus is our hope in 1 Peter 1:3-5 (ESV) “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an

inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Okay, time-out, let's be honest and not to downplay how awesome salvation is (“I mean no disrespect.” In mafia Italian accent, sorry I just watched the Irishman with Deniro, Pacino and Pesci and am on a little Mafioso overload), but doesn't eternal life seem like receiving a card that says, congratulations a tree has been planted in your name and will bloom in 50 years, or when you get a certificate from that great uncle who said he opened an IRA for you to be enjoyed when your 65 (exciting for me, but not so much for an 8 year old child). The whole concept of eternal life is a bit far off and intangible.

Jesus is our living (or better translate lively) hope because the expectation conveyed here is one of eagerness and confidence about what is to come. Literally, like an excited child on Christmas morning awaking with anticipation. This hope is meant to energize our lives today, in the midst of the trials and struggles we are currently facing.

2 Corinthians 4: 17 (ESV) “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison”

Romans 8:18 (ESV) “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Let's remember the Apostle Paul is writing to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) encouraging them that through their living hope of Jesus, their future is secure, even though they were encountering troubles in their present day.

Romans 5:2-5 (ESV) “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

This verse shows us how to unlock the full power of the *lively hope* we've been given. Romans 5:2 (ESV) "Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this *grace* in which we stand." It's like that card we got saying "a tree has been planted in your name" has a little inner pocket with ten \$100 bills. This is the "grace we have access to via our faith". Grace is that part of the gift of salvation that provides for our needs on a daily basis. It is the mercy, provision and strength we need to in order to authentically "rejoice" as Romans 2:3 (ESV) says, "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance."

We "rejoice" because through the "resources of grace" we may suffer but we are not overcome by these struggles. Instead, we overcome them and are rewarded with "endurance." Endurance is the ability to overcome the next challenge. As we continue to apply this enduring triumphant confidence to future battles, this demeanor becomes a part of our personality as Romans 2:4 (ESV) proclaims, "and endurance produces character," Once this is a part of who we are than lively hope becomes real as Romans 2:4 (ESV) continues, "and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

You see, at this point hope is no longer intangible or beyond our grasp because the gift of grace that accompanies eternal salvation has been made real through the very struggles of or life and bolstered our faith and hope on the other side. Through this tangible reality our *lively hope* (eager, expectant and confident faith) can now embrace these scriptures:

Isaiah 40:31 (ESV) but they who wait for (hope in) the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV) For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

I want to conclude today with what I hope will be a real gift of freedom for each of you today. It's summed up in the statement, "stop giving gifts that other's don't want."

When I was a kid, one year for Christmas (I think I was about 8 years old) my dad gave me a train set. And it wasn't just a train set in a box in was a fully built Tyco train town built on an astro-turfed 4 x 8 foot piece of plywood. A lot of boys would probably be thrilled with such a gift, not me. I was crest-fallen. I had absolutely no interest in toy trains at all. I wanted a Star Wars AT-AT from Empire Strikes Back (you know the big snow-walker machines the rebels fought against when the empire invaded the ice planet Hoth and Luke Skywalker hangs from the beneath the AT-AT and cuts it open with his light saber and throws in the grenade?) Anyway, I didn't mean to be an ungrateful kid, I just had no desire to play with this train set, which actually didn't bother my dad that much as he still got lots of enjoyment playing with it.

I share that because giving God's gifts to others is as important as receiving and fully utilizing the gifts He's given us. When we give God's gifts to others, make sure it is the gift they want to receive. Christians often evangelize (share the gospel with others) with a very blanket approach. Almost like a sale's pitch, ever eager to close the deal. Yet, God instructed his followers in Matthew 28:19 (ESV) to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Making disciples involves the same process Jesus did with his followers. Befriending them, spending time with them and getting to know them so that in time His influence would rub off on them and they would become like Him.

Too often we want to forego the process for the end result, pushing on them a gift they aren't yet ready to receive. This can actually turn them off to even being open to receiving the gospel. The very gift they may need is simply you in their life supporting them right where they are where you can teach them how to navigate the sufferings they are trying to endure. It could be through this very Romans 2:2-5 (ESV) process that you show them how to endure suffering to produce character and ultimately a living hope (that leads them to the salvation gift).