

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Hope – Proclamation of Hope

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In Greek mythology, the story of Pandora is one that has been widely scrutinized. And the myth goes that the great god, Zeus became angry with humans because humans stole the ability to make fire. And so Zeus creates this beautiful and this charming woman named Pandora. And he sends her to Earth to be married with a wedding gift. The wedding gift is a box that we know is Pandora's Box. It's more of a jar actually but that's okay. And so this box is opened up and when it is all these evils begin to pour out on humanity, these things like poverty, and sickness and disease and hatred begin to pour out. And Zeus quickly closes the box but all these evils have already come out all except one content - hope.

So for centuries, philosophers have debated what is the meaning of hope in this story. And what is the meaning of hope in all of life and you have different ideas. For those that think that hope is good in the story? Well, why was it in with the rest of all these terrible and evil maladies? Now, for those that think hope is bad in this story? Well, why was it held back then? Why didn't Zeus release it with the rest of the evils? And so we begin the debate? Is hope good, because it gives us strength in adversity? Or is hope actually a twist? Is it bad because it is the ultimate deception? Think making us think one thing when in reality, we don't achieve that thing?

Now, what is hope? And what is hope in? Is hope in eternity? Is hope in humankind? Is hope in self? Plato would say that hope is vain. He would say it's a passion of the uneducated, and so it can be exploited. Nietzsche would say about hope and reality, "It is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torment of man, not because it makes us lazy, because it's the deception, that we're reaching for something that we never actually attain." In the Age of Enlightenment, Locke would say, "The strength of our belief in something should be commensurate with the reliability of the source." So he's saying hope should not be in revelation, hope, should be in reason. And the object of our hope is not God, the object of our hope is self. Therefore, it's virtuous development of the self. Augustine would view hope in light of time and eternity, "We are stretched on the rack of time," he said, "hoping for the release of eternity." And there's Marcel who would say, "Hope is in the possible." A hoper is like a swimmer you're constantly meeting, a new wave crashing against you but you meet that with constant grace and it allows you to change over time.

There's a fascinating podcast called 'In Our Time', where Melvyn Bragg leads this discussion or this conversation, really. And they go through the years and the history of hope and different thoughts over time. Well, at the end of the podcast, its modern philosophers that are coming together, and they're wrestling with this one question. The question is this; can you actually separate hope, from theological construct? If there's a radical hope that something is after life ends can that be possible? Can that be supported if there is no God? And so you have this idea of humanistic thought or perspective as almost a metaphysical optimism?

Let's take a step back from philosophy for a moment and let's talk about the practical. 2020 foof! If there's ever been a year, that hope has been disappointed, right, at least hope as many define it, we think about okay. I just hope that life is gonna return back to normal. Well, I'm sorry, we still haven't got there. I just hope remember this, I hope that by summer we'll be back in routine. No, we're not even close. I hope that the kids are going to be in school by fall. No. Well, I hope that we're just going to be able to hang out with family and loved ones at the holidays. No way, it's not a happening. And so hope after hope. What do we do with this when hope it's constantly disappointed? Does it mean that hope is a deception? Or are we hoping for the wrong things? Are we hoping IN the wrong things? Maybe your hope is in government? Well, we have amazing civil servants, people that work at NCC in the government, but even they would say, listen; we are not the hope of the world. Is your hope itself? Well, we know how that story ends, I'm constantly disappointing myself. Is you're hoping a loved one? That's tough, because your loved one is human. So they're not going to be able to meet the requirements of these certain standards. Is hope in an event? Is hope in a circumstance? We have hope in all different directions and listen, 2020 as hard as it's been as rough as it's been, I wonder if it actually provides an opportunity for us to step into the distillation of true and genuine hope. I want to ask you today to consider biblical hope.

Hope is found 182 times in the Scriptures. It's about equal between the Old and the New Testament. Hope is used as a noun - I have hope. It's used as a verb - I hope to see you soon. It starts in the very beginning of the book in the book of Genesis, in Genesis chapter three. And then it goes all the way to the end of the book, in the book of Revelation, and everywhere in between. In Jewish faith, hope is intertwined throughout all of the Scriptures. They hope for freedom, and a hope for peace, a hope for justice, a hope for a savior, a hope for the Messiah. And so when Christ came, heaven touched Earth, in a new and profound way, not just in the pillar of fire by night, not just in the Red Sea parting, not just in the glory of the Lord on Moses face, but in the vulnerable form of a child. Christ is our hope! Biblical hope cannot be expressed as what we hope for, without the backbone of what we hope in. If you hope for redemption, that's all with the backbone of hoping in Christ, maybe you have a hope and restoration or hope that joy would come or hope that there is something beyond this physical life. All of that as the believer comes with the backbone of having hope, in Christ. Christ is in all things and he is **THE** hope that we put our faith in.

When the shepherds found Christ they couldn't help but proclaim hope to the world, right? And then, and we're going to talk about that in a few minutes, and then the magi find Christ, and they couldn't help but celebrate hope. Pastor Josh, will talk about that next week. And everybody who came across Christ's path had a revelation of hope. Our campus pastors, will talk about that in week three of this series, but we want to light a candle to the hope that is found in Jesus Christ.

I want to work and propose a working definition of hope that we'll use today. Hope is the confident expectation of the current and future glory that God is bringing about through His grace, often not yet

seen, but of which we eagerly and actively await. That's going to be easy to remember, isn't it? Well, let me unpack it a little bit with some bite sized statements. I'll start with this - hope, is active waiting. There's two primary words used for hope in the scriptures or in the Old Testament. And the first is yachal, which means to wait. The second is tiqvah, which means to wait, or to hope. It's got this deeper sense and it comes from the root word qaveh, which means cord or rope. And I love the different Jewish words because there's multi dimension to their meaning. And so you have this idea of hope, in a cord or a rope. And what is a rope? Its strands coming together, right? Its strands interlocking together. The idea that in hope we are interlocking our thoughts with God's thoughts, we are interlocking ourselves to Him. Its Jeremiah 29:11 it says, *"For I know the plans I have for you, "declares the Lord" plans to prosper you not to harm you,"* That you would have what? That you would have tiqvah, *"a hope and a future."* This idea that hope and our future comes in braiding our actions in God's actions and braiding our thoughts with his thoughts. It's when we braid together that our hope becomes his hope and we have an eternal hope. But rope when you pull on rope it tightens and what happens? It actually strengthens doesn't it? The interlocking tightens up. And this is the reality of our hope as believers. That hope also comes with a sense of adversity, with a sense of tension, doesn't it? There is common tension when we are expecting, when we are waiting for something.

Pastor Heather talked beautifully and eloquently about this in our zoom on Thursday morning, she talked about Psalm chapter 130, verse five, it says this, it says, *"I wait,"* which is qvah, *"for the Lord, my whole being waits."* You can already sense this tension, right, this wanting to press forward, this pulling on the rope, if you will. *"And in His word, I put my hope"*, which is the previous word, yachal - to wait. *"I wait for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning."* You can hear and you can feel the tension in the Scripture, can't you? And that's what I love about the reality of our hope that we have and the faith that comes from biblical hope that it doesn't ignore doubt and tension. No, it actually leans into it and it is strengthened in the tension. Advent looks back to the incarnation of Christ as hope coming into this world, and the representation and the presence of Christ in our lives bringing us hope, while also looking forward to a second coming of Christ. That is eternal glory that is to come. We have hope, yet we are waiting for hope. And here we are living in the tension between two things. Oftentimes, it's one or the other. Okay, I got hope in every day it's going to work out everything's gonna be okay. Or no, no, it's not nothing's gonna work out its all hopeless Nietzsche. It's never gonna end up where we want it. But listen, as believers we live in between the two - receiving God and his hoping his goodness in the here and now but also looking for that there is greater hope that will come that is coming through an eternal God that is Lord.

Thomas Aquinas makes the distinction between ordinary hope and theological hope. Ordinary hope, is described as this irascible passion, it's a pleasurable anticipation for the possible future fulfillment of a desire. Yet, there's theological hope. It's not a passion it's a virtue. It's a habit of the will. It's something that the divine grace infuses in us.

This is interesting, I think it was Aristotle who talked about what is a virtue and there are two elements to it. First is the wholeness or the fulfillment that comes, the fruit that comes through a virtue. But second is that you have to have action to achieve certain elements or certain goals within a virtue. So you can argue then, well, hope can't be a virtue then. But maybe it can Luther would argue, because maybe the virtue comes in the literal active waiting and dependence upon God. It's not on me. No, I am depending actively. I am trusting in the Almighty. It's something that we have to train the will to believe in. It's hope practiced, its hope believed, it's hope that is chosen on a daily basis.

We practice advents in a sort of active waiting, don't we? We prepare the tree. We love it. We put everything together and it's this active thing. And then we spread cheer all around us, and we sing songs of joy. And we pray and we light a candle and in all these things we're waiting and we're receiving, aren't we? We're anticipating and we're appreciating at the same time we're living in this tension that is the beautiful biblical hope. Hope is born through Christ. 1 Peter 1:3 & 4 says, "*We have a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus*".

Many people refer to hope when they actually mean a wish. We're great wishers, aren't we? But we're terrible hoppers. A wish is the object is chance, hope the object is God. And wishing is kind of like playing the lottery. Right? It's you're buying a wish and then you sit back and do nothing and maybe chance will bring this great thing about towards me. But hope is different. Hope is having faith in a faithful God. It's doing the work of anticipation and what the almighty might do and how he might show up and being active hope is not a step, it's a stance. Right? A step is doing one thing and then you're all done. But a stance is constantly being ready. It's constantly being aware. It's constantly anticipating. It's constantly being active, and understanding of what God is doing in and around us. Hope is eternal.

1 Peter chapter five says this verse 10, "*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered...*" We just blew up the world's definition of hope right there in that one scripture. So you're telling me hope and suffering goes hand in hand. These are a part of the interlocking that the scripture says. Is your hope to get what your mind craves in the here and now? Is your hope to protect or keep safe that which you want, or desire or that what you actually love?

I've been watching way too much Baby Yoda lately. And it makes my mind think about Star Wars when I think about this concept. It makes my mind think of what was on Coolies Arbasis (sp), sweatshirt earlier, a little baby Yoda. But I think back to Darth Vader, he didn't turn towards the dark side because of this desire to rule over all people. No, he turned to the dark side, because he was trying to protect that which he loved so deeply, it was this good thing. And he put his hope right there. But when he lost that which he loved so deeply, he lost his hope. And then he started down this road of pain, this road in which he decided to try to control everybody and everything in his path, so that nothing could get in and hurt him and hurt his heart in the same way. Misplaced hope is dangerous. Misplaced hope can become a religion for us. If I just hope in God, if I just hope that God will do this thing for me enough. If I hope so much, then I'll get what I want. If I just hope that maybe God will protect the things that I love or

protect me or just keep me safe, then it'll all work out. But unfortunately, the scripture doesn't teach this kind of hope. Jesus says, "*In this world you will have trouble.*" I'm sorry to say that today. I'm sorry to say that you and I that we will experience pain, that we will go through hardship that some of us have already walked through some deep pain in our lives. And some of us have some pain in front of us that we're going to need to face that we're going to have to face up to. Life is what happens on your way to your plans.

Do you judge hope according to what you have in this moment or do you judge hope according to what God promises eternally? Jesus says, "*You will have trouble but take heart, I have overcome the world.*" And he puts things in perspective that don't just have... His plans are not thwarted by our momentary issues or troubles or hurts. His eternal plans still exist, and still are moving for they're not thwarted by the world of sin that we live in and the consequence to our sins that we live in here in this world.

Agustine said, "God you have made us for yourself, you are restless until we rest in thee." It's this call out to eternity. Maybe you feel restless today. I wonder if that's this internal eternal hope that God has placed within every single one of us and it's reaching out towards that.

I love what I've learned from some of my African American brothers and sisters who don't call a service, a funeral, but call it a home going. And the idea that when someone goes on from this earth, if they have had faith in God, that it's a home going, that we lament the loss of the ability to be here and now with them. But we celebrate the life that was lived and we celebrate the fact that they are going to a place of greater hope and that God willing, someday, we will meet up again with them, that there is an understanding of eternal hope. Psalm 33:22 says, "*Lord for our hope is in you alone.*"

I want to just encourage you today if you don't have a hope today, maybe God is calling you at this very moment that by faith you can reach out to Him and He will pour his hope that is greater than our understanding into you. Receive that hope today. Eugene Peterson said this, he said, "Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It's not fatalistic resignation. It means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions. It's not compelled to work away at keeping up appearances with a bogus spirituality. Hope is imagination put in the harness of faith. It is a willingness to let God do it his way and in his time."

Luke chapter two, the shepherds were going about their assigned tasks in the field when God showed up, and gave them meaning, and he gave them calling. And the angels come and they reacted like all of us would react, they were freaked out. But the angels say, "*Don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy and this is for all people.*" A child has been born a Savior has been born the Messiah. And so they take off, they run and they catch up and they find Christ and they rejoice. And here's what it says in 20 of chapter two. It says. "*The shepherds return, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*" Notice their immediate reaction after receiving Christ was to proclaim him, to praise him, to proclaim His name. In other words, hope was prophesied,

hope was born, hope was received, hope was proclaimed, and hope multiplied. The shepherds, they were on the receiving end of this proclamation from the angels, and quickly they received Christ and what do they turn, they turn and immediately begin to glorify and praise and proclaim Christ.

I want to spend the next few minutes of our time talking about what does it mean to proclaim Christ. Number one proclaiming hope is lighting a candle in the dark. Remember what the Scriptures said came over the shepherds in Luke chapter two. This incredible fear came over them, darkness came over them, but then the angels showed up and the glory of the Lord came about them. In other words, light, it overcame all their fear.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said, "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness around us." I think of a friend in our small group, who shared in his words, he says, "Man, I was a rascal. I was going my own direction, serving self and my buddy got in my business, he got in my life and he proclaimed truth and hope and light, and it changed the course of my existence. And I received that and I became a different person, I became a different man and my trajectory was changed." And I love because he then talked about what it meant to show light and share faith to those around him. He said, "Man, we make too big a deal about sharing faith. You just do it every day. You can share faith by taking dinner to a friend. You could share faith by helping out a person getting stuff out of the car, and you help a neighbor get their stuff in their house. You can share faith by sharing your own story, and talking about the hope that is interlaced in our lives every single day" And he was talking about how to light a candle, how to live. He went from receiving the proclamation of faith to proclaiming constantly casting light on everyone around him. Craig Kocher in his commentary on our text states this, he said, "Christian hope is fundamentally different from optimism. Christian hope locks its steely eyes on the devastation of the world around it, and readily acknowledges that things may not get better. Christian hope does not bury its head and yuletide cheer and artificial lights but like an Advent wreath glowing stronger and brighter each week, this hope pushes its way into the brokenness of the world, clearing a path in the wilderness so the true lights might burst into darkness." Proclamation of hope it's lighting a candle. Proclamation of hope, builds strength through suffering.

In the last couple of decades there are some psychologists that make a strong argument that hope is more than a theory. Hope is a science. So you have Gallup and you have the New York Times and you have the Journal of Organizational Behavior and others that show studies that adults and children with higher hope do better in navigating injuries, disease, sickness, physical pain. They score higher on satisfaction, on self esteem, optimism, general outlook on life. They perform better in sports; they excel at higher rates in athletics. Listen to what one of the leaders in the international Family Justice Movement, Casey Gwynn said in his book, Hope Rising. He said this, "In every published study of hope every single one hope is the single best predictor of well being compared to any other measure of trauma recovery." He said, "We agree that it is time to declare to everyone who will listen the predictive power of hope in a person's life is greater than any other character strength." There are over 2000 studies on hope psychologists are saying hope must be declared.

Listen, here's what the scripture says about hope. Colossians 1:27, *"To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles, the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* You are the carrier of the whole vaccine. It's in your blood. You have been given that within you. It's down deep in your bones. It's down deep in your soul. And there are people in sickness, there are people that are hurting, there are people that are in pain, that need this life blood, and you've got it within you. Listen to psychologist speak it out what more do we need to be called to and we have been given an almighty eternal hope, from the great God who is. We have been called to proclaim hope so come on preach it, proclaim it with your life. And when necessary, use some words.

In Luke chapter two, we see Mary, and she's in this cave. She's in the middle of hay. She's in the middle of a stink of the animals around her. And she has hope in her hand, she has the Christ child. And she puts the child in the manger. Look at her surroundings, and the shepherds show up. And they tell everything and they glorify God. And the scripture says - Do you remember what it says about Mary? It says that she treasured these things in her heart. In other words, all the surroundings around her that would speak to no hoping within her all that didn't matter, hope overtook her. She treasured these things within her heart. This is what Christ does. This is what the hope of Christ is within us. It's why a man from Northern Ethiopia, who has no home and less than \$2 to his name, can have more hope than the person in Bethesda with a huge house and more money that they know what to do with. Because it's Christ in us the hope of glory, that is true and genuine. That is a gift that needs to be proclaimed. He is our hope, proclaiming hope reveals your purpose.

The shepherds, they remained shepherds after their journey. They didn't stop being shepherds after what they experienced. But they were more than that, weren't they? They became much more than that they became igniters of hope, proclaimers of glory, symbols of Messiah.

Viktor Frankl, widely known in a lot of different ways, he was a world renowned psychologist. He was of course, a survivor of the Holocaust and a survivor of Nazi survivor camps. And he came through that experience and one thing that he noted he famously wrote about the link between hope and the immunity of the body. And he illustrated it by the prisoners that died between Christmas of 1944 and New Years of 1945 this one week. Say okay, was there some sort of pandemic or was there a plague or something? No, there wasn't it was that all these individuals in the camps were looking forward to Christmas. Okay, we're going to get out of the camp by Christmas, surely they'll let us go home by Christmas, we're going to get to see our family. And they're hoping, hoping, hoping towards this specific thing, and they got to Christmas, and it came and it passed, and their hope died. And they died with it. When their hope died, it was like, we don't understand - hope is life blood literally. When their hope died, so to their immune system, so did their body, so did their will to live. And Frankel noted this but he noted something else. For those that we were able to touch and give hope it saved their lives literally. It didn't just save their lives, it saved our lives. Not just the person who heard hope or received it, but the person who proclaimed it because he said, "When you are constantly sharing hope with somebody else, it helps

people understand that they have a purpose to proclaim hope." In other words, when you proclaim hope, two things happen. Number one; there is a lifeblood and energy that will fill your soul when you do that in some form or fashion. And second, you lean in and you step in to the purpose that God has created for you to step in and be a proclaimer of hope.

I want to invite our worship team to come. I just want to take a moment and close things out with with two things. Number one, I want to give you an invitation to receive hope today. Scripture says in Revelation that Jesus is standing at the door and knocking, he is knocking. And if we let him in, he will come in and dine with us. It's this internal desire to commune with the Almighty. It's within us. He's waiting to commune with our souls. He's wanting to commune with us. He has given that invitation to you today. He desires for you to receive him by faith. And what does that mean? It means you simply through prayer, express your faith, in the Almighty, and He will come and grant you the Holy Spirit, who is a comforter and a council. Receive his hope today.

Second, just want to close with this simple application and that's this. Who's the person the neighbor, the family member, the friend that comes to mind that is devoid of hope right now? What's that name that comes to mind? Lock in your mind in that name. Take a moment just to pray over them. Pray in the Spirit over them. Write that name down on a piece of paper in your journal, in your Bible, write it on a chalkboard, jump on live prayer, begin to pray. You can hit the live prayer button right now and share their name or you can pray for to the have somebody else but we're gonna pray for them. Lock in on that name. And will you commit something? Will you commit to resolving to being relentless in hope for that person in this Advent season? Will you do that? And not in a way that's annoying, in a way that's gracious, and thoughtful, and intentional, but you be hope.

First of all, receive God's hope. Second of all, you proclaim hope in this season. Pastor Rob mentioned last week, advent is a time of expectation, and waiting. So today I pray that you would receive great expectation in this season. I pray that you would receive a pure and a genuine hope, and I pray that you would become a proclaimer of hope. In Jesus name I pray these things. Amen.