

The Audacity of Hope

Psalm 23

1 Cor 15:1-28

Congregation: Psalm 145:1-13

I thought that we would spend this morning on a specific topic that has been on my mind a lot this past week and next week we will jump back into the book of Mark. Even though I know that each and every one of you already knows the hope that we have in Christ, I thought that we would spend today not so much teaching and instructing about our hope, but rather just rejoicing together in the hope that we have. Thurs when Aaron and I went out for coffee we discussed it a little bit and as he said, even though these are all things that we are aware of it is always good to review and to reflect for if there is any time we need the hope of Christ, it is now.. As you all know the past few weeks have been a tough one for my family, I am not going to go into specifics here, but each of you here this morning knows exactly what I am talking about, and I thank each of you for your prayers, and support and words of encouragement that you have shared with us during this time. As I have been reflecting on all of these events, there have been a few things that have come to my mind and I thought that it would be beneficial to share because each and every one of us have faced difficult times in our lives, and if you haven't yet, believe me, you will.

There always seems to be something going on, you can't turn on the TV without hearing about some shooting, or the chaos that is our political system, and even our news organizations, everything seems corrupt, everyone seems to be lying, and there seems to be no search for truth. Even in this climate that we have in our society today, where we are told that which has always been considered wrong and unnatural is now considered right, and in fact celebrated and flaunted. It is easy in this climate to look at everything going on around us and lose hope. It seems that the world is spiral downward faster then it ever has before. It is common for people to put their hope into different things, hope that tomorrow will be better, and as we are going into this election season here again, people are putting hope in their candidate of choice that they can fix everything they see is wrong in this country.

But all of that hope, as Christians we know is an empty hope, it is nothing more then wishful thinking and desires. And even those who are not Christians are starting to lose hope in the things around them as it seems this world is spiraling out of control. Suicide rates are climbing, murder rates are climbing, violent protests, abuse, fear and frustration seems to be the rule now. But we, Christians can look at this world, can look at all the turmoil, chaos, and even death and still have hope, because our hope is not of this world it is in the one who has created this world.

I think that one thing that is incredibly important to remember as Christians during these trials and difficulties that often times they arise so that our faith is tested and is proved., how we react to the world around us, to the disappointments, trials, temptations, persecutions in our own life, how we respond to all of these things, in then end become a proof of our faith, of a true, God centered, belief. And this ends up not only being a sort of measure, or proof to ourselves of the legitimacy of our faith, but to others around us. When they witness our conduct, and reaction God uses our suffering for his glory through ministry. Something I think a lot of christians struggle with is, the mindset of suffering, I know I do and often can become introspective casting doubt over those things which I know to be true. We tend to focus on our suffering, but something that is helpful in those times is instead of asking God, why must I suffer so, why is he allowing this to happen to me, we should be asking Lord, how does this fit into your will for my life, how can this be used to further your ministry.

I know this may sound maybe like I am saying, just buck up and deal with it, but I am not, there is nothing wrong with suffering, with tears, and even anger in proper measure, but think about that for a minute. What does having such a mindset do? What it does it shifts our focus from ourselves, to God. Instead of focusing on what is causing our suffering, we begin to focus on why God may have allowed it, and what can be accomplished through it. Having this type of perspective is not easy, I am reminded of Josh and Jody's mantra when trials come, remember, it's better this way, for through this path God's will and purpose is accomplished. Those are hard words to say, but true words.

As we have gone through different books over the past almost 3 years, the one over arching theme that has always stood out to me is the faithfulness of God's people. We have gone through, Galatians, James, Philippians, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and now we are in the Gospel according to Mark and in each and every one of these books we see people dealing with various trials, temptations, and an admonition to remain faithful through them.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians they were dealing with men from Jerusalem who were bringing in the Jewish laws, and rituals into the church teaching that if they wanted to be a true son of God they must observe the Jewish laws and traditions, but Paul implores them, saying, "stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made you free" Now I could spend the next few weeks preaching on that again because the implications of this to each and every believer is life changing! But I am not going to spend time here teaching what Paul was teaching in Galatians but rather I want to just point out the trial, and sort of persecution these Gentile believers were going through having these men from Jerusalem come and attempt to hijack and strong arm their belief, what they has learned from Paul, and turning it into something it was not. That is why Paul wrote this letter to them, to instruct and encourage them to hold fast that which they know to be true and not to be deceived, and entangled under a yoke of bondage.

And that is what I want to take from Galatians this morning, is to stand fast in what you believe to be true. This I think is the foundation of dealing with trials and persecution. for doubt, and despair tend to be the first things that arise in our minds. When faced with death, whether our own, or a loved ones often times the first thought that comes into our carnal minds is why!, and then shortly follows the thought that this is unfair. This is one way that doubt creeps in, we begin to question God, thinking his way is unfair, that this trial unjust, and that we should not have to bear this load, we can begin to blame our selves, condemning ourselves for something we have done, or did not do. I don't know about you, but sometimes my mind goes to thinking anything that God allows as a test, or a trial must be because I did something wrong. And there it is, faith beginning to trip up, doubting what I know to be true, sure, it maybe punishment, or a result of some stupid thing I did or said, but mostly, it is just the simple result of a sin corrupt world and God allows us to go through it to test our faith. This is one way that our faith can be challenged, we may cry out to God complaining of our situation forgetting who it is we are crying out to. He is our sovereign loving father, who has in his grace, mercy, and sovereign will allows for bad things to happen to his people.. Now we may not be able to answer the why God has allowed it in specific situations, but we can in general terms, and it is mainly for our growth, for our benefit, for our ministry, and through such things God's grace and love shines through. Remember what James wrote in the first chapters of his book? specifically verses 2-4.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you maybe perfect and complete, lacking nothing." This is the why, of the why bad things happen to God's people. Why trials come, it is to prove our faith, so that we may grow in faith, and through it we become even more reliant upon God for all things.

I am sure you all noticed what I did with the title of my sermon this morning, but I think that it is true of the Christian have the audacity to have hope, in hopelessness, when in this world there is nothing but darkness. Yet that is the very reason why we can have hope, it is because our hope is not in this world but rather it is in God who has created the world.

Through out this past 2 weeks, I have had one verse that has been stuck in my mind like a record repeating over and over again pointing to the truth that our hope is not on this earth, but it is in Christ, and that verse we read this morning in 1 Cor 15, and it is verse 19. “ IF in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” Our hope in Christ transcends this world, it goes beyond anything that this world can offer, our hope in Christ is supernatural. Our hope is not in the man who was born, who ministered to 1000's and then was killed on the cross, our hope is in the Son of God who was born, who ministered and gathered to himself his people, his kingdom whom he laid down his life for, even on the cruel cross, and was raised up to sit at the right hand of the Father, for us. Let that just sink in a minute, and rejoice in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

Turn with me to Roman's chapter 8, starting in verse 28. “ And we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose.” Remember, it is better this way. “For whom he foreknew” You guys know this like the back of your hand, but think about it...God foreknew you, you were his, you were predestined to conformed, to be made in the image of his son, whom died for you so that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” So that through his death, we may become God's adopted children. “Moreover whom he predestined, whom he chose before the foundation of the world not having done any good or evil but by his will, by his grace, he called, and whom he called he also justified by the blood of his son, and these he also glorified. Because of Christ's work of redemption on our behalf, we are a glory to God, we are his children, and he our loving father.

Verse 31” What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Is this not beautiful? Does this not spring up hope in your soul? No matter what happens, we are children of the most high God, what can happen to us in this life that defeats or destroys that? It is this that we put our hope, it is in this that we rest. The accounts of the martyrs singing while being torn to shreds by lions in the Roman Colosseum, or the account Stephen crying out to God to forgive those who were stoning him as Paul looked on. I often reflect on that story thinking of the trigger of events that happened with the stoning of Steven. Holding the coats, and watching was a young Paul, who later became a champion of the very faith he sought to destroy.

I am sure the image of Stephen crying out to God, not for himself, but for those who were killing him had an everlasting effect on Paul. And speaking of Paul look at his ministry, stoned, imprisoned, kicked out of cities, and all the while even up to his execution remained faithful in his witness, and his ministry. And it is the same today is it not? the christian dying on a hospital bed in hospice care, how he faces death with a supernatural calm that only God can give. And we can go on and on listing 1000's upon 1000's of people who have faced the most hideous of fates without their faith ever wavering, not because they hoped that tomorrow would be a better day, but because their hope was in God, who is faithful and true and their souls are at rest because of what he has done for them. IF God is for us, who can be against us? .Keep a finger here, because we will be coming back to chapter 8 again shortly.

This hope that a Christian has is beyond explanation, it goes beyond human rational thought, this hope is supernatural, and just like everything else in our faith, this hope that we have in Christ, has been given to us. When we talk about having hope in Christ, we are not just wishing, or hoping for merely a possibility of salvation, and deliverance, but this hope is sure, it is concrete because we are resting assuredly in Christ. The Christian's hope is not only for deliverance in this world, and while that maybe a possibility and of course there is nothing wrong with praying to God for his mercy toward us asking to be delivered, ultimately having our trials, temptations, persecutions, sickness, or living longer is not only where our hope lies. Our hope is not only to be physically delivered, or spared, but our hope lies in the fact that we have been spiritually delivered from our sins and the death that they bring, we have been forgiven, and are no longer separated from God because of our sin, but and we have now become precious children of God, and heirs to his promises.

Think about that a minute, the very God who created you, who created the earth, the sun, the stars, has promised you reconciliation from before the foundation of the world, he promised to bring you deliverance from your sins, he promised to bring your soul from death, to life in his Son Jesus. With this God on our side? What do we fear? IF we are his precious children from before the foundation of this world, doesn't he already know your trials, your sufferings, and even your death? Matthew 6, "Therefore I Say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? Verse 33, But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things will be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things, sufficient this day is its own trouble."

There has been another overarching theme as we have gone through these different books of the bible these past few years, and that is what true faith looks like, how one who has true faith conducts themselves in this life as opposed to those with a false faith, or no faith at all. You do not have to listen to many preachers very long before you start to pick up a pattern, which is that a majority of their concern seems to be upon this life. Worrying about what you eat, what you wear, your job, your house, your money, your health, always focused on what you can do so you can have your best life now, how you can have good things happen to you because of your faith. But it would seem that the bible actually teaches the total opposite, that in this life we will suffer, and the reason, Well, one is because suffering produces faith and reliance upon God, and 2nd because the world is corrupt and full of sin, BUT, we have hope in deliverance, maybe not always in this life, but in the next.

Continuing again in Roman's 8, picking up where we left off verse 31. "What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? IT is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? IT is Christ who died, and further more is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written, for your sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet, Yet in all of things things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is hope, nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is sure, and guaranteed by the blood of Jesus Christ. What Glorious hope we have!

And because Roman's chapter 8 is all about our hope in Christ, let us just flip back to verse 1 and rejoice as we read it. Verse 1” There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.” Did you catch it? The Christian's hope even while he is faced with death is that because of Christ there is now no more condemnation, he has been saved from God's wrath, his sins have been pardoned and what lies ahead is glory! , verse 18 “ 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, for the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the son's of God For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God, for we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until not. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope,” The Redemption through Christ Jesus our lord, who reconciles us to God, the author and finisher of our faith.

What more can we hope for? What more can we having hope in, then the faithfulness, the mercy, and the grace of our father who sent his only beloved Son to die for us, in our place. To take our sins upon himself, the perfect spotless lamb of God and to suffer and die for us. This is our hope, Christ is our hope, and it is because of him, because of his work on the cross that we have access to God, the creator of all things, the author and finisher of our faith. There is nothing greater then this hope, this supernatural hope that no matter what we face, God will see us through.

In closing, I leave you this morning with this passage in Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men, the Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ, Amen.