

The Power of Hope  
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Matthew 27:1-10

Good morning,

We are in a heavy set of texts. Really, since October we've been in a heavy section of Matthew. In late September we saw Jesus' conflict with the priests and Pharisees turn a corner and come to a head, and really since then it's been intense passage after intense passage.

Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart."

Basically, he's saying 'it's good for you to go to a funeral - don't avoid thinking about death - you need to think about death so that you can prepare for it well. Only fools think any good comes by ignoring death.'

You need to think about the heavy things. You need to think about life and death. Heaven and hell. Sin, repentance, forgiveness.

So, if the last handful of sermons have felt heavy, that makes sense. They should. It's good for you. You don't want to constantly live under this kind of heaviness, but you do need to come here every now and again.

Today we're going to look at The Power of Hope. We're mostly going to be looking at the power of hope from its absence. Sometimes you can tell how important something is by seeing it in action. But often, you can tell just how important something is only when you see what happens when it is missing. In this text we will see the importance of hope by seeing what happens when it is missing.

So, what is hope? It's different than optimism. Optimism is just a confidence that things will get better in the normal course of things. Or that things will turn out well in the end, just on their own internal logic. There's nothing wrong with optimism, it's just not hope, it's just not what we're talking about.

Hope is the conviction that present realities are not ultimate. That there is a deeper and truer reality under what you see around you. That there is a deeper and truer story under all the chaos of world history, and under all the chaos of your own life.

Hope is the conviction that out of the **darkness** God will create **light**. That out of **death** God will create **life**. That out of **chaos** God will establish **order**. Out of **waste** God will create **abundance**. That out of the **mundane** God will create **meaning**.

Hope is both a letting go, and a holding on. It's a loosening your grip on present realities, both sorrows and delights, both highs and lows. And it's a holding on to the deeper reality **under** you, and **around** you, and **ahead** of you.

Hope is both an affirmation and a denial. It's an affirmation that the sorrows and delights of this present world matter, that they are real. It is through this **death**, that God will work **life**; through this chaos that God will work **order**; through this **dullness** and repetition that God is working **meaning**.

And hope is an affirmation that the goodness and life and beauty in your life is just a foretaste of the deeper reality, and the future reality. The work, and family, and friendship of this life are but seeds of the deeper reality.

It might feel like you're just teaching a kid to hold a spoon right, but really you're shaping a soul to love what's good, and to delight in what's beautiful. It might feel like you're just turning a wrench and cashing a check, but really you're testifying to the deeper reality of God's good order, and the future reality of his coming kingdom.

But yet, hope is a denial that this life is final. That what you see around you is all there is.

Hope isn't an eastern denial of the reality of the world - hope is an affirmation of the very real beauty and tragedy of this life. and yet, it is a denial that this world, this life is the final word, or the full word.

We can define hope this way "the patient, active, confident anticipation of future promised benefits."<sup>1</sup> Biblical hope exists in the middle of two tensions. The first is the tension between continuity and discontinuity.

The future hoped for is not just a continuous progression from present realities. This is optimism. Pure continuity has no space for a sudden, intervention of God. This is the kind of hope that secularism can hope for - the future might be very different, but we'll get there just by one little baby step at a time.

But on the other hand, Christian hope is not pure discontinuity either. The future hoped for is also not a total break from present realities, where there's no real connection between now and then. This is kind of like an eastern, Hindu/Buddhist worldview. In that view the good and bad of this life is basically just an illusion, and salvation is learning to ignore it all, and eventually escape it. To see everything around you as unreal, and unimportant.

Christian hope embraces both continuity and discontinuity. Romans 8:28 is the classic verse for this tension - "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." It's not total continuity, it's not like things just innately work themselves out - God has to intervene to make all things work together.

But, it's not total discontinuity - it is not in spite of these things, or totally ignoring these things, but through these things, God will bring about the good for you. So, we don't look to our circumstances for our good, but they also aren't irrelevant, it is *through* the circumstances of our lives that God works our good, our salvation.

Herman Bavinck touches on this in a really beautiful way. He says, "Just as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, as carbon is converted into a diamond... so too, by the recreating power of Christ, the new heaven and the new earth will one day emerge from the fire-purged elements of this world, radiant in enduring glory and forever set free from the 'bondage to decay.'"<sup>2</sup>

Hope is not that God would just wipe away your past life, but that he would redeem it, and transform it into something beautiful. Not that he would take away the worm, and bring out a bird, but that in some mysterious way he would transform the caterpillar into a butterfly.

The **second tension** is between certainty and uncertainty. Romans 8:24-25, just a few verses earlier, spells this one out. "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

So, we see certainty and uncertainty. On the one hand we are certain. God will fulfill his promise. He is good for his word. He will save those who trust in him. He will work all things together for good for those who love him. We can be certain of that.

And yet on the other hand, we are uncertain of *how* he will bring that about. We don't know the trials we will face, but we know he will give us the strength we need when we need it. We know the life he calls us to is the life of his presence and blessing, but we don't know what that's going to look like, or all the challenges we will face along the way.

So, hope lives in the tension of certainty and uncertainty.

What we will see today is both of those tensions breaking down. We're going to see the power of hope in the chaos of what happens when it's missing.

First, we will see the importance of HOPE to turn sorrow and regret into repentance and salvation. Second, we will see the importance of HOPE to loosen our grip on the present order of things. And third, we will see the importance of HOPE to hold on to what is true when everything around you screams against it.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service: Volume 3*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, Seventh printing (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 317.

<sup>2</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 4*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 720.

Let's jump into the text.

Notice the first two verses. This more or less sets up the story for today. "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death." So, after the events of verses 57 through 68 they took a little break until morning. Then the priests got back together to decide what to do. And their verdict was death. But, notice there is a wrinkle in their plan. They aren't allowed to carry out capital punishment. About two years before this, back near the start of Jesus' ministry Rome took away Israel's right to execute capital punishment. That's why they had to send him to Pilate, to get Rome to execute him.

This is such an interesting move in God's providential rule of history. As God would have it, it wasn't just the Jews who put Christ to death. It was the Jews and the Gentiles. It was all of us. Not just the race of Abraham, but the whole race of Adam is caught up in the murder of Christ. This means it's not "them" that put Christ to death - we shouldn't scoff at the wicked priests, or the wicked Romans. It's us - all of us, sons of Adam, all of us are implicated. It's not their wickedness, but my sin that put Christ to death.

So, then we get to the meat. Verse 3 through 5 will give us our first point today. Hope and repentance. Hope enables us to repent and come to Christ.

Let's look at Judas' story. "Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself."

This is a tragic story. Judas is a son of Adam just like you. With an eternal soul just like you. Nothing about his sin was unpardonable. Plenty of Christ's betrayers, and Christ's murderers were forgiven. But instead of hoping in the mercy of God, to escape the pain of his guilt he cast his soul into hell.

Think about his story. When did he change his mind? When he saw that Jesus was condemned. He might have expected Jesus to talk his way out of it. He's seen him do it before. He might have thought that Jesus would vindicate himself, shame the priests, and be set free. Or work some miracle and walk right out. Jesus would be honored, the priests shamed, and Judas would have made a good payday, no harm no foul. But that's not how it played out.

Judas realizes the consequences of his sin and feels terrible. Now, note how we tend to judge sin by its consequences, but God judges sin by our hearts. Judas wasn't bothered by his greed, and his murderous betrayal of his friend and teacher, until he saw the consequences. We judge outcomes, God judges hearts.

So, just because someone else's sin has bigger consequences, it doesn't mean our sin is less serious. According to God, if you hate someone, but don't hurt them, you're a murderer. But if you kill your coworker in a work accident, but never hated him, you're not a murderer.

We compare our consequences to others and feel pretty good about ourselves, but God looks at the heart. Often, what we think of as our own righteousness is really just a good upbringing and fear of consequences. As far as the heart is concerned, the only difference between porn and adultery is the fear of consequences.

We need to be very careful that we don't start judging our sin by its consequences. If we only start to care about our sin when we get caught, or called out, we're in bad shape.

Ok, so notice Judas' repentance. Notice how far he really went. He confessed. That's not nothing. He admitted he sinned. Second, he makes restitution. He returns the money he made through sin. And third, this is huge. He doesn't blame shift. His repentance actually goes pretty far. He doesn't say, "oh but you tricked me." Or, "oh but I was so desperate to feed my family." He owns it. "I sinned." He doesn't explain. He doesn't rationalize. He doesn't contextualize, "sure, I sinned, but like this, not like that."

But still his repentance falls short of saving repentance. He doesn't hope in Christ. He doesn't believe. He doesn't understand who Jesus is, he doesn't understand what Jesus came to do. Jesus said that he would die and rise again, but Judas didn't believe.

He can only go as far as owning his sin and wanting to make it right. But he can't. He can't make it right. There's no humanly possible way to make it right. He needs the mercy and forgiveness of God, but this, he never looks for. So, he loses hope in himself, and he has no one else to hope in. So, falling into complete despair, he takes his own life.

Judas failed to hope in Christ because he could only see continuity, and had no room in his mind for discontinuity. He saw that Christ is on the road to the cross - and he saw no hope for him. And he saw that he himself was on the road to hell - and he saw no hope for himself. He could only see continuity. There is no humanly possible hope for Jesus, and no humanly possible hope for himself.

But hope sees both continuity, and discontinuity - with God, anything is possible. With God, the cross can lead to the empty tomb. And with God, no sinner is too far gone.

True repentance comes from BOTH desperation and hope.

Judas goes about half-way to true repentance. He despairs of himself - he sees the very real evil of what he did. But - he doesn't look to Christ.

True repentance takes an honest look at yourself, and finds no hope there. But then looks at Christ and finds hope in him. This is why we need hope in Christ to really repent.

If we don't have hope in Christ, we won't let ourselves really despair of our own righteousness. We will always hold back. Always reserve some measure of righteousness for ourselves. We will admit that we've sinned, but kind of justify it, or blame shift, or minimize it. You know how it goes:

"I only did what I did because of my upbringing." Or "the church I grew up in was really messed up, so it's their fault I walked away." Until we hope in Christ, we will be hard pressed to let go of hope in ourselves. It's only when we start to hope in Christ that we can really come to let go of our own righteousness - to see ourselves for what we really are.

Judas failed to repent because he didn't believe that Jesus came to save sinners - like real sinners. Not people who are basically good, but admit that maybe every now and then they technically probably sin.

Jesus said in Luke 5:32 "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

For Judas, his hope failed because he thought all along that Jesus came to save basically righteous people - people like him who made mistakes every so often, but were basically good. All of a sudden, when he sees the consequences of his sin - his whole self-illusion is blown up. He can no longer see himself as a basically good guy, just trying to make ends meet. All of a sudden he sees himself for what he really is - a sinner.

And the thing is, he's right, and that's true of all of us. We all tend to exaggerate our virtues in our own minds, and downplay our sins. In our heads - Our virtues are big, and that's the real me. But our sin is small, and that's not the real me. That's just an illusion. Left to our own devices, without the renewal of the Holy Spirit, we're all our own little gods, at the center of our own little universes.

We're all sinners - none of us is righteous.

Judas' problem isn't that he's wrong about himself - it's not that he lacked self-esteem - but that he's wrong about Jesus. Our hearts are so bent towards self-righteousness that we just can't believe that Jesus really came to save sinners. That's why, when Judas' self-illusion was shattered, he had nothing left but despair - he still basically believed that God only rewards the righteous.

We want some kind of works-righteousness to be true - some kind of self-flattering system - we want to believe that Jesus didn't come to save sinners, but that he came to save basically good people like.

This is why the gospel is so offensive - you have no righteousness to bring to the table. Jesus came to save sinners - and no one else - like you and like me.

This is why the Bible consistently depicts conversion as a miracle. We will only see ourselves as sinners in need of a savior if God first opens our eyes, and changes our hearts:

John 3:3 - "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Becoming a Christian is not something we can just do on our own initiative. We need a spiritual rebirth to even see our need of a savior.

John 6:44 - "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." No one ever just decides to take up their cross and follow Jesus, not unless God himself compels him from a renewed heart.

Ephesians 2:8 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." The very faith we believe with is a gift. We can't see ourselves rightly, and we can't see Jesus rightly without God-given eyes of faith.

This is why Judas' repentance only got him half-way. For him, he saw that he really is a sinner. But because he didn't really know Christ, and his mission, he couldn't hope. He couldn't hope that Jesus really did come to save sinners like himself.

For most of us, our problem is a little different - it's not that we're sinners without hope, but that we have too much hope in ourselves. Wherever you are, what you need is true hope in the true Christ. Hope in Christ will give you the freedom to see yourself as you really are, and will give you the freedom to see Christ for who he really is, and what he has really done for you. So let go of hope in yourself, and hope in him.

So when God opens your eyes - maybe for the first time, if you're not a Christian yet, or for the hundredth time for those who've been walking with Christ - when God opens your eyes and reminds you that you really are a sinner - remember that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, just like you, and hope in him.

Ok, second point. Hope and Letting Go. Now let's consider the priests. Here's the point: Hope helps us let go of what we can't hold on to.

Verse 4, Judas says, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They respond, "What is that to us, see to it yourself." Then verse 6, "But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.' So, they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore, that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day."

Note the hardness of the priests. Judas comes in and says "he's innocent - I made a mistake." The priests reply, "so what? What does that matter? We already decided to kill him." They may as well have said, "yeah, we know, that's why we tried him at night."

So, what is the priests problem? Basically, they wanted to hold on to their way of life, and they saw Jesus as a threat to it. They wanted to hold on to their way of life and they couldn't see anything beyond it. They saw Jesus as a threat to their authority - the people loved Jesus.<sup>3</sup> And they saw him as a threat to their religious identity. They thought that if Jesus stirred up the people Rome might come and destroy their temple.<sup>4</sup>

They saw Jesus as a threat to their authority and their temple. So, because they couldn't possibly see how God could do anything without the temple, they couldn't even hear Jesus. They didn't know what would come if they accepted Jesus for who he claimed to be, and they couldn't take that uncertainty. They wanted the certainty of their temple. They couldn't hope.

This drove them to serious, calloused sin, in the attempt to bring about God's purposes. Hope - trusting that God is working out his purposes through all the highs and lows - means that we can let go of what we can't hold on to. There are many things you should fight for - but only in a righteous way - once you feel the need to resort to sin to hold on to whatever it might be, it's time to let go.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 21:46, "Although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet."

<sup>4</sup> John 11:48, "If we let him go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Judas came and basically said, "take your money back, he's innocent." This should have made them rethink their plan. But they were too committed, if Jesus lives, they lose their authority, and possibly the temple.

They refused to let go of their authority, their temple, and their way of doing life and faith - because of that, they crucified the Lord of Glory.

So, the priests and elders failed to hope because they couldn't see how God could possibly do anything in the world apart from them and the temple. The priests failed to hope in Christ because they couldn't accept the uncertainty. They had their temple, and that was comfortable for them. They would rather stick with what is comfortable than believe who Christ claimed to be. They couldn't venture on hope if they weren't certain about how it would all work out.

For us, the stakes won't be that high, but they could have just as serious consequences for us personally. For each of us, when Jesus calls us, he calls us to take up our cross. Out of a certain way of doing life. And into something a bit unknown.

That means we need to let go of certain things. Could be sinful things, sinful lifestyles, sinful habits, sinful business practices.

Could be more neutral things. Not wanting to be seen as a weird Jesus guy. Or not wanting to take the time and effort to get connected at the church.

For each of us, accepting Christ's call will require hope. Because it will require us to let go of something known, something secure, and step out into something unknown.

We need hope, hope in Christ to believe that what he has for us is greater than what we leave behind.

That doesn't mean it will be greater in terms of earthly comfort and ease. But greater.

For some of you, Christ is calling you to become a Christian, to really join the church, and get involved in the life of faith - faith is not an individual sport. That will probably be uncomfortable for you - you don't know the language, you don't know the secret handshakes. What you need is hope - hope that what Christ has for you in his church is greater than all the obstacles in front of you.

But for some, Christ is calling you to let go of some dream. Maybe you're just realizing that your hopes and dreams just aren't playing out like you'd hoped, or Christ is calling you to do something that will make them impossible. Either way, you're looking at a life that you always wanted, and realizing that it is not going to happen.

For you, you don't know what the future holds, and you're having to learn to imagine a future without that dream - what you need is hope in Christ. That hope won't make it easy, but hope in Christ will help you endure. To hope that whatever Christ has for you, he will hold you all the way - he will be with you all the way. The future might not be what you had always imagined, but hope in Christ will help you walk into it with contentment and peace.

So, hope in Christ can help us let go of what we need to let go of. To help us embrace both the certainty and uncertainty of a life of hope.

So next, for our third point, we'll see Hope and Holding On. Hope helps us hold on to what we must not let go of.

Look at the last two verses, verses 9 and 10. "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.'"

So, this will take a bit of work to unpack. There's a whole little sub-discipline in Biblical Studies referred to as "The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament." Or "OT in the NT" for short. Basically it is just asking the question, "how do we understand how the New Testament authors were using the various texts that they chose to quote." Some are pretty straight forward, and some are very hard to understand. This one is probably somewhere in the middle, but leaning towards the hard side.

There are a few key principles that are usually helpful to get something of a grip on these references. There are a couple that will help us with this one.

First, it isn't uncommon to combine a few references into one. So for instance, Mark 1:2 says, "as it is written in Isaiah the prophet..." then he goes on to reference something Isaiah said, but also includes a couple lines from the prophet Malachi.

Something similar is happening here. He mentions Jeremiah, but then what he says lines up most closely with a couple lines from Zechariah. There are a few different takes on what is going on there, but I think he is quoting Zechariah, but wants to point us towards Jeremiah as well.

Ok, so another NT use of the OT principle that will help us here is the way references are meant to bring in the broader context, not just the words referenced themselves. When a certain person, or event, or phrase is referenced, you are usually meant to consider the broader context as well, both for the donor passage and the receptor passage.

Think of the reference and the source like two tether points that help you see both stories in light of each other. In this case, that phrase is very similar to Zech. 11:12-13, which reads: "Then I said to them, 'If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.' And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So, I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter." If you have your Bible, it would be helpful to turn to Zechariah 11. I want you to see a bit of the broader context. If you grab one of the blue pew Bibles, it's on page 798.

Zechariah 11-13 is a prophetic decree concerning God's judgement on Jerusalem because of their wicked leaders, resulting in the piercing of God, but ending in the surprise mercy of God, for the forgiveness of his people. That's what's happening in Zechariah that Matthew is drawing our attention to. The judgement of God on Jerusalem for their wicked leaders. The piercing of God. And the surprise opening of the fountain of his mercy. That is meant to help us understand the story that Matthew is telling.

Let's look at Zechariah a bit together.

Chapter 11:7-14 - "So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders. And I took two staffs, one I named Favor, the other I named Union. [8] And I tended the sheep. In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. [9] So I said, "I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour the flesh of one another." [10] And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. [11] So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord. [12] Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. [13] Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. [14] Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

So here, Zechariah hires himself out as a shepherd to symbolize God as the shepherd of Israel. He gets into conflict with the other shepherds - who represent the rulers of Israel, the priests and elders. So, he gives the flock over to be destroyed. And breaks his staff of Favor. He gets paid his wages, that's the part that lines up with our text.

Then we get this in the next chapter, 12:10 - "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

Then in the next chapter, in 13:1 - "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness."

So, God's judgement on Jerusalem for their wicked leaders leads to the people mourning for the pierced and rejected God. But in the end, a fountain for forgiveness is opened. Sounds familiar?

Matthew can assume his readers know how the story ends, but even still, he includes this reminder. As Jesus gets trotted off for his second trial, we are only in the first stage. The end of this story is not agony and sorrow, but mercy, forgiveness, and life.

The point of this reference is not just some reference to a time that something similar happened in the Old Testament.

It is meant to show us exactly what both Judas and the Priests were missing. Even through this dark night of judgement, God is working out his great purpose of forgiveness and salvation. Judas couldn't come to true repentance because he couldn't see how God could bring life out of this death. The priests couldn't let go of the temple because they couldn't see how God could fulfill his promises without it. And we are reminded that even when things look dark, we need to keep holding on to God's promises.

Ok, so why does he mention Jeremiah? We don't have much to go by. But, I think we do have enough to make a confident guess at what he has in mind. One detail that doesn't get mentioned in Zechariah is buying a field.

In Jeremiah 32, God commands Jeremiah to buy a field during the siege of Jerusalem. Babylon had surrounded Jerusalem, and was about to destroy the city. There really was no hope of escape. And yet, God tells Jeremiah to invest in real estate in the countryside. Why?

As a symbol of hope in God's power to fulfill his promises even through apparent calamity.

Jer. 32:14-15, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

Basically, even though things look dark now, even though there is no human hope for God and his purposes, yet, through this darkness, God will bring light. The story doesn't end with Babylon destroying Jerusalem. And the story doesn't end with Rome destroying Jesus Christ. The Christian has hope that even through death itself, God will fulfill his promises.

So, this reference to Jeremiah and Zechariah reminds us to hold on to hope in Christ in the darkness. That what feels mundane and meaningless to us, like buying a field when your nation is about to get overrun, in God's providence, is far more significant than we realize.

And that even when things feel dark, and chaotic, God is working his mercy and purpose through it all. Not *in spite* of the darkness. Certainly not *in* the darkness. But *through* the darkness.

So, Biblical hope is not just optimism. It's not just a sunny outlook on things. It's not the idea that things will just work themselves out in the normal course of events. Optimism as Jesus goes to Pilate would be absurd. Humanly speaking, there is no way this works out well. Hope, requires discontinuity, requires God to intervene and dramatically rearrange things.

And Biblical hope is not just kind of a generic hope. It's not just a "the arc of history bends towards justice" kind of hope. And it's not because that's wrong or silly, but because that doesn't say nearly enough. History doesn't just bend on its own. History is bent towards God's kingdom because God bends it. Generic hope can hope in "the universe" or "the human spirit." But without a good and wise God over the universe, that kind of hope just has no legs to stand on.

But it does point to something encouraging. This is what Paul talks about in Romans 1, or what Calvin calls the seed of religion, or what C.S. Lewis calls the God-shaped hole in our hearts. Even in our secular culture, we can't help but hope in something, or someone. We intuitively believe that there is a good governor over history. Humans are made to worship, we are made to see God's hand of providence guiding the course of history. And even our secular culture still does.



We suppress it. We call it “Evolution,” or “The Universe.” But whatever it is, we think of it as a personal force with a will and a good purpose. We cannot shake our creaturely instinct to hope – as an act of worship. The problem with generic hope is not that it’s wrong, but that it’s incomplete.

But, Biblical Hope is Hope in Christ.

No matter how dark things are right now - because of who Christ is, because of what he has done, and because of what he has promised - I know he is going to work things out in the end.

To summarize, first, Hope in who Christ is, enables us to come to true and complete repentance. It allows us our first big repentance, when we come to Christ for the first time. And it also enables our day to day repentance.

Second, Hope in Christ's plan and kindness enables us to let go. To let go of old habits and comfortable rhythms. And to let go of dreams that we don't want to let go of.

And third, Hope in Christ's design enables us to hold on to what matters now. He is the author of this world, he is the one who gets to decide what is significant and what isn't.

The world tells us big and flashy lives are significant lives. But, 1 Timothy 2:2-3 tells us it's the “peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” that is significant and meaningful in God's eyes.

So, faithfully working your job day in and day out, to provide for your family, that is meaningful in God's eyes. So, faithfully raising your kids, teaching them how to hold the spoon right, that is meaningful in God's eyes. The world sees that as small and uninteresting, but God sees that as beautiful and meaningful.

And fourth, Hope in Christ's promises enables us to hold on to the future that is surely coming.

In the middle of our suffering, and the middle of our chaos, hope in Christ turns our eyes away from the cross and towards the empty tomb. Ultimately hope in Christ enables us to draw near to our own grave – not metaphorically, not rhetorically, not symbolically, but our grave, our death – and not see it as the end of everything we know, but as the beginning, the beginning of true life with Christ.

Thus, the power of hope.