

A Burning Hope

March 19, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Scripture reflection

(Here is a passage to help your group as you worship. You can go through it together or in groups in meditation and/or in prayer)

Have one person read through Psalm 22. After the reading, ask the group to pray prayers of praise based on what they heard as the Psalm was read.

Icebreaker

What is something you hoped for as a child? What is something you are hoping for this year?

Text for Discussion: I Peter 1:3-9

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

HOPE is a sure and certain anchor of the soul that orients our present and assures us that, no matter what storms may rage, one day all suffering will be healed and all the inscrutable contradictions will vanish. It assures us something so beautifully harmonious will come to pass that it will suffice for all broken hearts, reconcile all resentments, and atone for all the crimes of man's inhumanity. One day we shall embrace one another, weeping tears of joy which will more than make up for everything that has come to pass. This is a heavenly hope.

As followers of Jesus, we are sojourners whose true home is in Heaven. Our status as resident aliens means we will suffer, often feeling displaced, fearful or isolated. What we need most in this life is hope – a hope rooted in Christ's resurrection. Our spiritual rebirth is a gift of God, and through it we receive a priceless inheritance that will never spoil. It cannot be negated by our past or revoked because of our actions. It is entirely secure, safe in Heaven, guarded by God's power. We therefore have an anchor of hope to rely on through faith, no matter what trials lie ahead. Rather than fixate on our circumstances, we can focus on our walk with God.

Why don't we rejoice in this? Too often, some other hope is shaping our present life. It may be the hope for love, family, work, wealth or a fresh start. (Or we may despair, lacking any hope.) But even if these hopes are realized, they are perishable and therefore cannot bear the weight of our love. We need to allow the unfailing hope of Heaven to animate our hearts. By doing so, we can uproot resentments and bitterness, and our hearts can be consoled even in the midst of suffering.

Why would God allow such suffering, though? Because we cannot see a reason from our limited vantage point, our pride assumes there must not be one. But if we have a God big enough to be mad at for all the world's pain, then we have a God big enough to have reasons we cannot possibly fathom.

Although the Bible calls us to rejoice, it isn't calling us out of our tears. A grieving heart and a joyful soul can coexist. Some joy can only enter our hearts by having our hearts broken and then reclaiming the hope of Heaven. This isn't optimism; this is hope rooted in the certainty that our suffering is not random and will be rewarded. One reason God allows these trials into our lives – for a little while, if necessary – is so our faith may be strengthened and purified. As we endure suffering, the impure motives for our faith are burnt away.

What results is a precious confidence in the goodness of God. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18). Joy and hope always go together because joy and Heaven always go together. Joy wells up within us because it doesn't depend on our circumstances. Joy breaks through when we least expect it. And when we rejoice in the midst of suffering, what it produces is something Heavenly.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What is the relationship between trials and rejoicing?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- 1) “Hope is a certain anchor for the soul...” What is the difference between this (biblical) understanding of hope, and how we normally think of it?
- 2) Do a word search on the word “hope” at www.biblegateway.com. Break into groups of 2-3 and look up 5 verses per group. Name 5 characteristics of biblical hope you see in these verses.
- 3) Read vs. 4 again out loud. What exactly is “our inheritance”? How is this tied to our hope?
- 4) **Guiding Question: Read vs. 6-9—What is the relationship between trials and rejoicing?**
 - What is the role of Jesus in all of this, according to vs. 7-9? How does that become a reality for you?
- 5) How do you deal with trials in your life?
 - Have you ever felt it impossible to rejoice in a trial? Why?
- 6) Read James 1:2-4. Name a time in your personal experience when your trials led to growth. What was the experience like?

Praying for One Another

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests.)

Break back into groups of 2-3, and share about a trial that you are currently facing. Give space to each person to share as deeply and as detailed as they would like (give up to 5 minutes a piece, if needed).

Ask each person to then write a one sentence prayer request, based on their current trial. Have each person write down the prayer request in their phone, and email it to themselves. Ask them to pray once a day that one sentence prayer, and then forward the email to themselves again every day for a week.

At the end of the week, compose a one-paragraph prayer, and send it to the person who you’ve been praying for all week.

Reminder: Please encourage group members to consider attending:

New Leader Training

Saturday, April 1st: 9:00 am-12:15 pm

<https://pacificcrossroads.tpsdb.com/OnlineReg/730>

Note: Attending does not commit you to leading, but if you are interested in leading a group this is the necessary first step.