

01-20-08 – Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

Trouble, An Opportunity for Joy (series)

Part 3: “Disappointment: A Route to HOPE”

Introduction: How many of you have experienced disappointments in life? This next question is rhetorical – you don’t have to raise your hand. How many have felt disappointed by God? I have been disappointed by other people and yes, even by people in the church. I have even felt disappointed by God. I was disappointed in 1985 when I thought I felt a call toward ministry and was then diagnosed with cancer. God was in the boat with me through that experience. If you were here last week, you understand that statement more deeply. Pastor Harry Chatburn brought us a message that fit perfectly into our series on Trouble, An Opportunity for Joy. I felt disappointed that, even though I am here to complain about it, the chemo therapy has left me with serious and permanent hearing loss due to nerve damage. I have been disappointed in job related issues that seemed unfair. I have been disappointed in some decisions that I have made over the years. Of course our spouses never disappoint us. I will not share any examples in this area or I would disappoint Corinne right now.

I’m sure each of you has experienced disappointments in your life at some point, and some may be experiencing disappointment right now. Let me just say this, “It ain’t over!” You will continue to be disappointed as long as you are alive.
Real encouraging – isn’t it?

Pastor Jerry said in the beginning of this series, “I predict you will have Confusion, Disappointment, and Conviction in 2008 and beyond.”

Pastor Harry said last Sunday, “I guarantee you will face trouble in life.”

I am saying today, “You will be disappointed by people and circumstances.”

BUT ...

Confusion can be a route to a stronger FAITH.

Disappointment can be a route to a steady HOPE.

Conviction can be a route to deeper, steadfast LOVE.

READ - Romans 5:1-5

Romans – The apostle Paul is the author. It is written later on in his life and ministry. He has already wrestled with the Law and Grace and has established a solid foundation of truth and understanding of salvation and the HOPE of the believer in Christ. He was mature in his faith and resolved in his convictions and HOPE. His goal was to take the Gospel of Jesus to the unbelievers in the West (Spain) just as he had done in the East. He was also in tune with the Holy Spirit who may have been giving him wisdom as to the fate that awaited him in the near future. So this letter includes his sound teaching and understanding of God to be left in Rome as a strategic center or headquarters in the West. The church was already established, yet Paul writes a systematic gospel as a source of truth and an anchor for the soul.

Paul never made it to Spain, but his systematic gospel was left for all to grasp the HOPE we have in Christ by the grace of God. This HOPE of salvation is a future event that is guaranteed, for true HOPE is a confident expectation of something promised but not yet acquired.

How can disappointment be a route to HOPE? “*Only the grace of God permits us to participate now in that which properly belongs to the future.*” (Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Volume II – N.T., p. 522). Those who believe have assistance in being sure of this HOPE we have. We have been given the Holy Spirit to assure us.

Eph 1:13-14 – “*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory.*”

Disappointment can be a temptation to give up, to cave in, and to yield to the worldly view. It is much easier to bail out of a relationship than it is to work on repairing and reconciling. We are trained to avoid conflict, run from confrontation and escape disappointment. When someone hurts us, hurt them back – right? When someone disappoints us – get out of that relationship and protect yourself. Do we take the time to honestly ask God what His will is for us? Why is the divorce rate in the church just as high as in the world? People allow disappointment to overtake their hope. You can choose to let “the hope of one day being with Christ become a deeper passion and a solid anchor that keeps us steady in the worst storm of rejection. A hope that keeps us going when we feel most alone begins to take over the central place in our affections ... No one except God will love you perfectly.” (Pastor Jerry – thoughts for this sermon).

Illustration: A Missionary was sitting at her second-story window when she was handed a letter from home. As she opened the letter, a crisp, new, ten-dollar bill fell out. She was pleasantly surprised, but as she read the letter her eyes were distracted by the movement of a shabbily dressed stranger down below, leaning against a post in front of the building. She couldn't get him off her mind. Thinking that he might be in greater financial stress than she, she slipped the bill into an envelope and quickly penned, “Don't Despair.” She threw it out the window. The stranger below picked it up, read it, and looked up, and smiled as he tipped his hat and went his way.

The next day she was about to leave the house when a knock came at the door. She found the same shabbily dressed man smiling as he handed her a roll of bills. When she asked what they were for, he replied:

“That's the sixty bucks you won, lady, Don't Despair paid five to one.”

(Charles R. Swindoll – Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life)

Maybe we should clear up a couple of definitions before we go any further...

Disappoint – *fail to satisfy the hope, desire, or expectation* (Webster's)

Hope – *1. to cherish a desire with expectation of fulfillment*

2. to long for with expectation of obtainment – **TRUST, RELIANCE** – *desire accompanied by expectation of belief of fulfillment or success.* (Webster's)

Is this the definition you have for hope in your mind? This is a strong definition – stronger than the way most of us use the word HOPE today. We still consider HOPE more like “wishful thinking” - don't we? When we HOPE for something we really mean we wish it might happen, but we do not have a “certainty” about it. “I hope I get that job.” “I hope it doesn't rain when I invited all those people over for a BBQ.”

What is a Biblical definition and meaning for HOPE? “HOPE focuses attention on God in Scripture and fills us with eager expectation. No one who learns to hope in a biblical way will ever be overcome by disappointment! Rather we (believers) are filled with patience, encouragement, and enthusiasm.” (NIV Encyclopedia of Bible Words, p. 343, Zondervan).

Our text for today tells us that we can *rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*. Not only do we rejoice in this wonderful expected hope for the future, but we can rejoice in sufferings and disappointments too. Come on – work with me here. The Bible is telling us this. We can see all three components of our series in this passage. If we have been justified by FAITH, we have peace with God and access to God guaranteed. What sin destroyed, Christ has restored. As we face sufferings and persevere through them, we develop stronger character as we trust in the promises of God, which creates in us a steady HOPE that will never disappoint us. This is possible because God has poured His LOVE into our hearts by giving us the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing the inheritance that awaits us in Glory. If we could just grasp that concept, we could handle anything. This is the kind of HOPE the Israelites had and the kind of HOPE the early church had. It is the kind of HOPE God desires all of us to have. **READ – Romans 5:1-5 NLT**

Hope in the O.T. – each of the two Hebrew words for HOPE point us to look ahead eagerly with confident expectation. The fulfillment of HOPE always lies in the future. Therefore, patience is a common partner of HOPE.

One of the Hebrew words, **QAWAH**, focuses on what awaits us. Job, probably the oldest book in the bible, addresses this aspect. You know the story ... Job has suffered huge loss – loss of family and possessions. He must have been deeply disappointed. His friends gather around him to offer their wisdom and advice along with his wife.

They say to Job, “Dude, you look like hell. What’s up with this loyalty to God who is obviously against you? This doesn’t seem to be working for you at all. You must have messed up big-time to deserve this treatment. Why not just curse God and die, and put an end to all this misery once and for all.”

Job has a choice, as we all do in times of disappointment and trouble. He could take the advice of his friends, which would be easier by far – OR – he can tough it out and remain faithful to the promises of God. Disappointment can be the route to a steady HOPE.

Job says, “*If the only home I hope for is the grave, where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me?*” (**Job 17:13, 15**). His friends tell him to trust in his own righteousness, but Job eventually finds the solution that works, as the psalmist writes, “*LORD, what do I look for? My hope is in You!*” (**Ps. 39:7**). Job was doubly blessed for his faithfulness.

God had revealed His faithfulness to His covenant over and over. The people then may not have known as much historically as we do now, but they knew this - **God is faithful** and reliable. If God had a specific plan for the future, then it was trustworthy. God could be trusted, and if our HOPE is in Him and His promises, then we can wait in confident expectation that it is sure to come.

The second Hebrew word for HOPE is **YAHAL**. This focuses on our present experience as we look ahead. It is sometimes translated – **WAIT**. This term takes our attention to God as a deliverer. He will act in the future to save the one whose HOPE is in Him. So – we must wait in confidence until God acts. This is the HOPE of Israel – as they wait in confidence for the Messiah to come according to God’s promise – confidently – patiently.

This kind of HOPE never dies. **Ps. 71:14** – “*I will always have hope.*” When we have HOPE, we have courage to face each new day, for “*the LORD preserves the faithful ...(therefore) be strong and take heart, all you who HOPE in the LORD.*” (**Ps. 31:23-24**). Our HOPE as believers is not based on what might lie ahead, but on the fact that God is trustworthy, and what He has promised has always come to pass. So – we HOPE in the sureness that His promises will happen for sure. **Ps. 119:49-50** – “*You have given me HOPE. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.*” We are told in the O.T. to: “*put your HOPE in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love, and with Him is full redemption.*” (**Ps. 130:7**).

I heard a statement that was used as an opener for a Christian radio broadcast that I wanted to find and write down. Then I came across it in a book by Chuck Swindoll. Someone has said ...

“We can live forty days without food, eight days without water, four minutes without air, but only seconds without HOPE.” People have lived longer than expected because of HOPE.

Illustration: Years ago an S-4 submarine was rammed by a ship off the coast of Massachusetts. It sank immediately. The entire crew was trapped in a prison house of death. Every effort was made to rescue the crew, but all ultimately failed. Near the end of the ordeal, a deep-sea diver, who was doing everything in his power to find a way for the crew’s release, thought he heard a tapping on the steel wall of the sunken sub. He placed his helmet up against the side of the vessel and he realized it was the Morse Code. He attached himself to the side and he spelled out in his mind the message being tapped from within. It was repeating the same question over and over. The question was: **“Is ... there ... any ... hope?”**

(Ben Patterson – The Great Essentials)

As time moved forward, the prophets revealed more of God’s plan. When the temple fell in Jerusalem the Jews grasped onto Jeremiah’s words, “*You will return from the land of the enemy. So there is HOPE for your future.*” (**Jer. 31:16-17**). The O.T. never shifted from the conviction that relationship with God is the HOPE of Israel – and it is God who is our HOPE as well. In God alone are we to find a source of confidence and patience. All we can do is wait expectantly. “*I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in Him.*” (**Is. 8:17**).

Hope in the N.T. – All prophesies pointed to the coming Messiah. In the N.T., Messiah has come, but not as expected (by man), yet exactly as expected and planned by God! He was and is Immanuel – God with us. The promise was fulfilled – God has never let His people down. The word HOPE is used 85 in the N.T., but only 5 times in the Gospels. This is because Jesus, our HOPE, is with them, living among them. It is Paul who really sets the stage for HOPE in his epistles. He cements in the N.T. concept of HOPE... HOPE is always the certain expectation of something good from God. It is also something we must WAIT for. So the O.T. expression and meaning of HOPE has remained the same over centuries. However, in the N.T., we have a revealed sense of God’s plan and the wonders He has in store for us.

The N.T. documents God’s fulfillment of His promise to humankind in the person, ministry, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Promised One – the Anointed One. Along with the fulfillment of God’s promise, a new promise is introduced to God’s people ... Jesus will return in power and great glory. Evil will be conquered at last and the Kingdom of God will be re-established just as He originally intended. The book of Revelation is an entire book of HOPE for the church. Hope today is still rooted in a relationship with God. We can remain faithful, no matter what disappointments we experience, because of the hope we have.

In fact, when we experience disappointments, we have a route to the true hope that will never disappoint. The early church was disappointed – they faced persecution and death because of their faith. John writes to them of the sure victory that awaits those who remain faithful - to those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. We have HOPE – Christian HOPE. We will never be disappointed in His promises.

Jesus' resurrection was documented and proves there is a resurrection of the dead. Therefore, **we do not “grieve like the rest of men who have no HOPE” (1 Thess. 4:13)** – when death invades our lives. We live in the promise of salvation - eternal life in the presence of God and part of His Kingdom, if we have asked Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. We have not experienced it yet. We must wait with patient endurance for our HOPE to become reality. Someone who doesn't have this relationship with God cannot understand this HOPE. They can only relate to wishful thinking. Paul tells us that these things are spiritually discerned and are foolishness to those in the world. But we have the Spirit of God in us to assure us of the certainty of the HOPE we have in Christ.

We have a present as well as future HOPE. As we take each struggling step toward the future, we are also growing in faith to take us through the next disappointment in life. Through these experiences we are becoming more like Christ – as He desires us to be. Christ in us (by the Holy Spirit) becomes our HOPE for the future as well as for today. **Our faith rests “on the HOPE of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised” (Titus 1:2).**

Max Lucado's latest book is called 3:16 – The Numbers of Hope. Rob and Krystn gave it to me for Christmas. In it he explains how John 3:16 is the center of Christian Hope. Everything we HOPE for is wrapped up in this one verse. We have all memorized it. Max calls it a “twenty-six word parade of hope.”

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

He loves – He gave – We believe – We Live.

Everything pivots on one phrase in this verse – “whoever believes.” It's that simple. It is available to anyone, no matter what, no matter who, **WHOEVER**. You can't earn it, you don't deserve it. No matter what credentials you have or degrees or prestige – there's only one way to obtain this promise of God. You must **BELIEVE** – with all your heart. This is what gives the Christian the kind of HOPE that surpasses disappointment, sorrow, rejection, suffering, and even death. We have the HOPE of a life forever with God.

As Christians, we have a life to live here in a world of disappointments. How will you handle life's disappointments? Will you use them as a wedge between you and God, or will you use them as a route to HOPE? The choice is yours!

The first century church faced the most horrifying persecution known to man. How did they get through the disappointment that the evil Roman Empire was winning out over the church? How did they have the faith to lay down their lives banking on the promises of God as they knew them? They had HOPE – a certain assurance of the reality of God's promise that they were on their way to Heaven and into the presence of Almighty God, who would soon judge the living and the dead and make all things right. The evil world will one day be judged, and the faithful believer in Christ will be vindicated and rewarded. Our eternity hinges on one key element. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who gave Himself as an atoning sacrifice for your sin, so that

you might share in the inheritance of all believers and have a part in the Kingdom of God? With this HOPE, we can face amazing odds, persecution, ridicule, disappointment, and even death with a strength that can only come from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to His words ...

READ – Rev. 22:12-17 – The HOPE for the future with God for eternity.

When you experience disappointment, let those times be a reminder to you that we have a promised place in Heaven with God for Eternity. Allow that disappointment be a route to HOPE – HOPE that we belong to the Lord, who loves us unconditionally, who purchased us with His Blood, who gave us His Spirit to get us through this life, and who is coming back to put an end to evil and establish His Kingdom. There is so much more in store for us than what this life has to offer.

If you are a believer, remain faithful – rededicate your life and future to God. If you have never received this great gift from God that yields this kind of assurance and confident HOPE, then what are you waiting for? This promise is for you – for all or whoever believes. The choice is yours. Choose Wisely! You can walk out of here today no different than the way you came in, OR you can allow God to transform your life. All you have to do is ask Him!