

TO BE A VOICE OF HOPE

INTRODUCTION

Move 1

Let me tell you a story
about someone who was inspired by hope.

It's the story of a little eight year old girl
when her parents abandoned her
in a house in Ashville, North Carolina.

Left without food or supervision,
she and her brothers and sisters
ate nothing but potato chips and a few cans of tuna.

Within days, an older sister found the six children unsupervised.

Eventually social services intervened.

Those who were old enough were left on their own.

The rest of the ten brothers and sisters were dispersed
among foster homes and adoption agencies.

She spent her childhood as an orphan and ward of the state.

As circumstances would have it,
the foster home in which she was placed
was an open field away from a small church
in the mountains of North Carolina.

This girl, now nine years old,
would walk herself to church every week,
despite the fact that her foster family
was essentially irreligious.

At the age of fourteen,
she told God

that she would do anything
and go anywhere in the world,

and she dreamt of perhaps going to Africa as a missionary.

While many of her brothers and sisters
followed the path of their parents
and turned to lives of alcohol and drugs, and promiscuity,
she began to walk a different course.

Defying the pattern of a family of junior high and high school dropouts,
she went on to college,
and earned awards for her work,
and proceeded to postgraduate studies,
receiving a master's degree in theology.

This story is a vivid reminder that, in its essence,
the gospel is a message of hope.

Move 2

When the gospel is born in our hearts,
it gives us a picture of who we can become in Christ
and what God can accomplish in our lives.

The gospel has the power to take the orphan
and make her the friend of the fatherless;

to the take the brokenhearted,
the outcast,
and the lonely,
and make them instruments of peace, forgiveness and healing.

¹⁶ *[Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

¹⁸ *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:16-18)*

We understand that a Christ-less world
is a hopeless world.

At the same time we seem to forget
that a Christ-filled world
is a hope-filled world.

One of my favorite stories in the life of Jesus is in John 8,
where the religious leaders confronted Him,
wanting to condemn an adulterous woman.

I've always been struck by how Jesus,
even when others tried to force Him into meanness,
would not allow it.

If there was ever a perfect opportunity
to bring down the wrath of God on a sinful woman,
it was right then.

And yet from that encounter with this woman caught in adultery,
thrown naked before Him,
we have Jesus' famous words,

*“If any one of you is without sin,
let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7b).*

He asked, *“Who condemns you?”* and she responded, *“No one.”*

Right here Jesus revealed the heart of God
when he told her he didn't condemn her either.

He simply commanded her to go and sin no more.

This is an important guide for the church.

Move 3

We are God's voice of hope.
Those who have known nothing
but condemnation and shame
will find a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

This should be one of the markers for a New Testament community.

Yet even beyond being a voice of hope for the individual,
the church should be
a place of inspiration about the future.

We are to be a voice of hope
because we are a people of hope.

A follower of Jesus Christ has no excuse for pessimism.

Move 4

The Lord God spoke to Jeremiah
and reminded him
that He knows the plans He has for us,
plans for a future and a hope,
plans for our welfare and not destruction.

The prophet teaches us that
the natural outcome of being connected to God
is being optimistic about the future.

The church of Jesus Christ is always looking forward.

It always believes in the promise of tomorrow
and is never overwhelmed by the difficulty
or even the failure of the present.

Move 5

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, Paul gives us an inside look
into the hearts of the Thessalonian Christians.

² *We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.*

³ *We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 1:2-3)*

They were a church that was ignited and fueled by faith, hope and love.

Could it be that the ingredients
for awakening a revival among us
are right before us?

Could it be that while we've been searching
for innovations and new strategies
to effectively engage this radically changing world,
...the secret to seeing first century results
lies in the first century church?

Move 6

The Thessalonian church was marked by
the triad of faith, hope and love.

They became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

And their faith had become known everywhere.

They were a people known for their voice of hope.

Why? Because they possessed the three marks of conversion:

- 1) Turning from idols
- 2) Serving God
- 3) Waiting for Christ's return

The awesome shift involved in "turning from idols"
to the one true God is gigantic.

Once a person turns his back on himself, hope is a real possibility.

Neither hope nor salvation is rooted in self.

It can only be embedded in the Redeemer!

Their daily decision to deny self and “serve God”
is the essence of faithfulness.

Their “waiting on Christ to return” showed
that
they possessed a version of reality not of this world.

They were a model church
because they received the word of God,
not as the word of men,
but as it actually is,
the Word of God (1 Thess 1:13).

They were a church full of hope
because they lived to please God!

And once you tell God
that you’ll do anything,
and go anywhere in the world,

and once you dream of doing the impossible, then you’re ready.

You’re ready to believe in the promise of tomorrow

You’re ready to believe that
you will never be overwhelmed by the difficulty
or even the failure of the present.

The Bible says about Abraham that,

¹⁸ *Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* (Rom 4:18)

I am astounded at the power hope has!

At age 15 Robert Ramos took the helm of his uncle's "Brooklyn street gang"—the Phantom Lords.

In two years under Robert's leadership,
the 15-member gang grew into a 65-member, two-chapter crime wave.

There were shootouts on the block all the time.

There were murders on a regular basis.

On or off hard drugs,
Robert himself thought little of sticking a gun in someone's mouth and saying,

"Your money or your life."

In or out of reform school and prison, he was leader of the pack.

But in 1986, serving time at Greene Correctional Facility,
70 miles up the Hudson River,
31-year-old Robert went to chapel one Sunday, encouraged by an older inmate.

Robert remembers, "He told me if I kept on with gang fighting in prison,

I'd wind up killing somebody and never see the streets again,

And never live with my wife and kid again."

Robert served his time and when parole booted him back to Brooklyn,
he returned to his gun-slinging street wars,
this time with more drug-crazed abandon.

With nearly the entire neighborhood wishing Robert dead,
his wife urged him to get help at a local church.

He walked in to a service where he heard the Lord speak to him.

He said, "I felt God calling me,"
but he said,
'First let me put these drugs away, then I'll come to You.'

But he couldn't break away from that bondage.

One week later, Robert was arrested.

Sitting in New York City's Rikers Island jail,

a suicidal Robert felt an urge
to contact the preacher of that Brooklyn church he'd attended.

"And," he says, "I asked him to come and see me."

Robert remarked, "after we studied the Bible, I said yes to Jesus
because I came to see
that knowing God
was my only chance for hope in this life."

CONCLUSION

Robert teaches us something important today:

When a person becomes a Christian,
they automatically enter into an identity crisis.

You are not who you thought you were,
and reality is not what you were led to believe.

The truth rests with God
and
the gospel is your only hope.

Can you use some hope today?

Jesus is your source of hope.

Jesus died for you.

God is waiting for you to come home.

Will you come to Jesus today?

Please come to Jesus now...

http://www.pfm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Stories_of_Hope1&CONTENTID=9946&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm

http://www.mustardseed.org.nz/index.cfm/verse_for_day/index

Paul says about the Thessalonians
that they were

inspired by their hope in Jesus Christ to endure (1 Thess 1:3)

In other words, we are to endure all things without losing hope!

The Bible teaches us that
one's particular situation
isn't the determining factor
because God speaks.

Hope is a psychological state,
but it isn't one that depends upon
one's particular circumstances.

If it were, then our hopes would be dashed on a daily basis.

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Abraham, biologically speaking, was as good as dead (Rom 4:19),

and Sarah's womb was also dead,
and yet
Abraham didn't weaken in his faith.

He didn't weaken in his faith
because he was persuaded that God
had the power to keep his promise.

Church, Abraham's example teaches us something important!

If we don't long to possess Abrahamic hope,
and takes pains to gain it,
a shorten perception of reality will exist in our minds.

God's Word reports and confirms what is beyond our ability to detect.

For the Christian the word "hope" means: A joyful and confident expectation that God will do what he says. He does it because of the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Hope is not wishful thinking, or a vague aspiration. It's not wanting things to turn out well, whilst remaining uncertain that they actually will.

Hope is the absolute certainty we have that God is good and that His promises are true.

Hope is actually personalised in Jesus himself, He is our hope!

Hope is not found in the good life we try to live. Jesus says that our hope for eternity lies not within us or anything we can do, but in Him alone.

To dream the impossible dream;...
to fight the unbeatable foe....
To bear with unbearable sorrow....
to run where the brave are not to go....
To right the unrightable wrong...
to love pure and ungodly as well....
To try when your arms are to weary....
to reach the unreachable star!!!!...

This is my quest, to follow that star,No matter how hopeless, no matter how far....To fight for the right without question or pause....To be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause!!!...And I know, if I'll only be true...To this glorious quest, that my heart will lie peaceful and calm...When I'm laid to my rest...And the world will be better for this....That one man, scorned and covered with scars...Still strove with his last ounce of courage....To reach the unreachable stars!!!!"