

**PBC20070722AM2**

**Hope Endures**

**I Corinthian 13:13**

**July 22,2007– Sunday, 11:00 AM - Dr. David H. McKinley**

*The rule of three* is a principle in English writing and composition that suggests that things are always more effective, more satisfying, and often times funnier if they come together in numbers of three. So many times—whether we realize it or not—we put things in threes because of the way it helps to present and communicate concepts or ideas more effectively to others. At a football game, we hear, “Go! Fight! Win!” The motion picture industry has discovered *the rule of three*. How many times have you watched movies that are produced in trilogies? Certainly it was true of the great *Star Wars*. There were three in the original series and three in the prequels. We also have the popular *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Then we have *The Three Musketeers*, *Three Blind Mice*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *Three Stooges*, and *Three Little Pigs*. Maybe before you arrived this morning you had cereal that goes “snap, crackle, pop”. If a genie appears in a story, how many wishes do you get? Three. And by the way, the Aladdin series was a trilogy as well. Even in preaching, preachers are often known to use three points and a poem.

I heard about a preacher who decided to encourage the congregation in the area of giving one Sunday. He said, “Our church budget is running a little bit behind. Whoever gives the most in the offering this morning will be able to choose three hymns for us in worship today.”

Once the offering plate was passed, the preacher noticed that someone had given \$1,000.00 with no name written on the outside of the envelope. The preacher lifted the envelope and said, “This is the largest gift given today. Who gave it?” And as he looked around the congregation, a lady sitting at the back of the room lifted her hand very slowly and sheepishly. He spotted her and said, “Oh, Miss Ruthie. Come down here.”

Embarrassed, Ruthie got up and made her way down to the front of the church. The preacher said, “Ruthie, I so appreciate your generosity to our church today. True to my word, you may choose three hymns. What three hymns would you like?” She looked around, found the three most handsome men in the church and said, “I’ll take him and him and him!”

Even Miss Ruthie knew *the rule of three*. I think you’re beginning to get the point.

The effectiveness of three is even true in the Scripture. Let’s look at how the Apostle Paul closes the well known passage on love found in Corinthians 13,

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV).

When Paul condensed the virtue and the Christian life down to three simple words: *faith, hope and love*.

Last week, I spoke on faith. Faith is where it all begins. You become a Christian by faith. Salvation cannot be earned through your good works; it is a gift you receive by faith. Grace has provided it; grace has paid for it. We have salvation through the grace of God. But faith is the operational principle by which we become a child of God. We enter a relationship with God by faith.

Today, I am focusing on the second aspect of the Christian life found in 1 Corinthians 13:13—that of *hope*.

Someone has said that the greatest enemy of man is not disease; it is despair. For all the fun, attention and interest I have gained by talking about *the rule of three* and how it relates to us in life, there is a rule of much greater magnitude and proportion that relates to every heart. It is *hope*. We need to know and experience hope in our hearts! Why? Because life is filled with so many repeated hope-depleting and hope-eclipsing experiences, we need hope to cope.

One day on my way to work this week, I noticed a very nice vehicle on the side of the road with its emergency lights flashing. On closer inspection, I noticed the car not only had one flat tire, but two! A person can generally cope with one flat tire because there is a spare. But who has two spares? One flat is an interruption; two flats create a complete diversion. I thought how true that is in life. We often have “two flat” experiences that bring us to a place where we struggle to find hope.

*Hope* is one of the most visible, essential and vital words in the Bible. Nowhere do we find the word, hope, more prominently placed than in the Psalms. I love the Psalms because the Psalms give expression to human emotion. The Psalms are an outpouring of the soul of man before God, and yet they give expression to all humanity. They portray where we are in worship—the best as well as the worst of times. For example...

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules (Psalm 119:43 ESV).

Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope (Psalm 119:49 ESV).

Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word (119:74 ESV).

My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word (Psalm 119:81 ESV).

You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word (Psalm 119:114 ESV).

Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope! (Psalm 119:116 ESV).

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words (Psalm 119:147 ESV).

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope (Psalm 130:5 ESV).

Over and over, the psalmist gives expression to this hope that he has in life amid struggle, difficulty, heartache and pain. What is true for the psalmist is also true for us—we have hope to cope in life!

In Romans 15:4, we read...

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Romans 15:4 tells us that Scripture was written for us. It comes from yesterday, but applies to us today. It was there for those who lived before, but it is also for here and now, you and me.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Romans 15:13 ESV).

In Romans 15:13, Paul was praying for the church in Rome, but you know what? That has been my prayer for you today, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is a principle that we must see, a truth we must capture. *It all begins with the God of hope.* God is the source and strength of hope.

Why is that so important to understand? The *source* of your hope will determine the *strength* of your hope. If the source of your hope is right, then the strength of your hope will be sufficient. If the source of your hope is wrong, then your hope will fade and fail.

*Hope* from a biblical perspective is not *hype*. You can hype yourself up with positive thinking, placing hope in positive thoughts. In fact, some people in our culture will interpret *hope* as having a positive attitude, “It’s wishful thinking. It’s hoping for the best. It’s believing the best.” But what is the source of their hope?

A negative circumstance can quickly eclipse a positive attitude. If the source of your hope is positive thinking, it won't be long before your thinking will focus on the struggles in your circumstance. Instead of hope, you will soon experience defeat.

"The God of hope" [Romans 15:13] will give you strength. When your hope is focused and founded on God, it will change your life. We have the witness of Scripture to prove this truth. In the Old Testament, we read about Abraham, Moses and Joshua; Samson, David and Solomon. In the New Testament, we find Peter, Paul, and Mary. Well, not exactly in that order, but they're there!

From the pages of Scripture, we witness who God is and how He works in human circumstances. God has given us Scripture in order for us to find hope in Him. He loves you and He cares for you. He knows your hurt, your circumstance and your need. And today, the God of hope can and will fill you with hope that you might be able to endure. Let's look at an example.

### **Hope Helps Us Cope with the Reality of Disappointment**

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:1-2 ESV).

We see here the opening verses of a dark chapter. It is dark because it takes place before daylight, but it is also a dark time in the lives and hearts of the Christ-followers who had been in the innermost circle of Jesus' life and ministry. They were completely overwhelmed and distraught with the fact that the One they loved, the One they followed, the Miracle Worker, had been shamed, spit upon, beaten and ultimately crucified on a Roman cross. The One who came to love, care, heal and forgive had been placed in a grave along with the hopes of those closest to Him. And it is with the backdrop of this darkness that our story begins to unfold.

Mary Magdalene, faced with the reality that her Savior is seemingly dead, has the further grief and disappointment of seeing the stone rolled away from the tomb and His body gone!

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb (John 20:11 ESV).

The Bible tells us that when Mary looked in the tomb, she saw two angels. Still overcome with grief and frustration, she turned around and saw a man whom she thought was the gardener. She said,

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away” (John 20:15b ESV).

Can't you picture Mary scrambling in frustration? “Where is Jesus? What have they done with Him?”

The person Mary presumed to be the gardener opened His mouth and simply said her name, “Mary.”

It was Jesus! Mary had not recognized Him! But when He spoke her name, everything changed. Jesus was not dead; He was alive! All hope was not lost; it had been reborn!

Have you faced disappointment in your life? Have you had a day to where it became immediately apparent life wasn't going to be the way you expected it to be? Like Mary, you may have experienced the inner turmoil of anxiety and frustration due to disappointment. Was it a financial crisis, an unexpected medical report, a strained relationship with someone you love? Do you know disappointment? The only thing that gives us the hope to cope is the reality of hope we find in Jesus Christ.

In Luke 24, the Bible tells us that a couple of the disciples were walking on the road toward Emmaus. As they walked, they discussed all the things that had happened. They did not recognize Jesus either He joined them on their journey and listened to them as they expressed their disappointment.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened (Luke 24:21 ESV).

They thought He was the right Messiah. They thought Jesus was going to let Israel go free from the oppression of the Romans. They thought He was going to be a political leader. They remembered that He said that if He died, He would rise on the third day! However, it was the third day and they didn't recognize Jesus. Disappointment. Things don't work out, turn out, or end up the way we expect, but listen—it may be that the very place of your disappointment is the place where God is calling your name.

Years ago, Baptist preacher Vance Havener, said, “Disappointments, His appointments.” Just as Jesus called Mary, He's calling you. He's speaking to you through His Word today. He's speaking to you by His Spirit. He's calling your name because He loves you and He cares for you.

Jesus wasn't playing hide and seek with Mary or the men on the road to Emmaus. They just weren't looking. They weren't listening. They didn't see the situation from the right perspective. That is what disappointment is, isn't it? You thought it would be one way but it is another. You see disappointment ultimately is a place where God allows me to find hope. So hope helps me to cope with the reality of disappointments.

## Hope Provides Us With Answers for the Uncertainty of Doubt

In John 20:24, we meet Thomas, one of the best-known disciples of Jesus. However, when we hear his name, many of us immediately think of the nickname that has been associated with him throughout history: Doubting Thomas.

How would you like to bear that nickname? “Hey... hey, Doubter. How you doing, Doubter?”

Have you ever doubted God? Let’s be honest. Let’s read what the testimony of Scripture says about Thomas.

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:24-25).

“I can’t believe this! I can’t do this! I don’t understand this!” Have you ever been there? Have you ever doubted God? I have.

You may be thinking, “*Christians are not supposed to doubt.*” Where did you get that idea? You doubt. I doubt. We all doubt. You know why we doubt? We doubt because life isn’t the way we thought it would be. And when the circumstances of life do not match up with what we believe about God, we often doubt.

There are honest doubters and dishonest doubters. Honest doubters are willing to admit they doubt and they bring their doubts before God. Ultimately, the honest doubters find help and hope in Him. Dishonest doubters use doubt as an excuse. Doubt is a smokescreen they use to stay away from faith. These “smokescreens” can include intellect, a sense of materialism, philosophy and facts in life. Dishonest doubters use doubt as a reason why they don’t believe in God or His Word.

As a pastor, I direct people to the evidence of the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and the lives of millions of people who have been transformed throughout history. I believe because of the accuracy and integrity of this Book. But even knowing this, there are times I struggle with doubt.

Can I tell you something? God is not intimidated when we doubt. He doesn’t cringe somewhere in the corner of heaven and think, “*Oh, I’m just so intimidated. They don’t believe.*” God is not like that. God is so much bigger than our doubts. He sees and knows so much more than we do. There are times when the hurt, the heartache and the struggle in life make us doubt. In those times, we must be honest with ourselves and with God.

Years ago, author, pastor, and Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll wrote a little booklet where he identified three things that make us doubt:

*Things I believe should never happen, happen.*

Disease, divorce, death. So many things fuel the cells of doubt in life. “I know they happen to others, but they shouldn’t happen to me.”

*Things I believe should happen, never happen.*

“We should get pregnant... I should get married... I’m due for a promotion... Why haven’t they recognized me?... Isn’t there a reward for doing a good job and being at my desk?” Have you ever had those kinds of feelings? Have you struggled with doubt when you thought things *should* happen and they *never* happened! You couldn’t understand it or explain it. Possibly you were afraid—like the psalmist—that you are going to be put to shame because you had hoped in the Lord and His word. Have you been there? Are you there today?

*Things that I want to happen now, happen much later.*

“I wanted to buy this house... I wanted to relocate... I wanted something to happen. It’s just not happening! God, why am I waiting? Why the delays? Why the invasion and struggle?

What is it that gets you through doubts? It is hope in the Lord. Life will present you with challenges. When difficult circumstances come, are you going to equate the character of God to the rightness of your circumstances? No. Sometimes the circumstances of life aren’t right, but that doesn’t change who God is or what He is doing. Circumstances don’t change God’s love for you. Circumstances don’t change His faithfulness or His mercy. Circumstances don’t fade the testimony of Scripture. As I read Scripture, every person known for their faith was first a person who was known for their doubt.

Circumstances are not an accurate gage from which you can measure the character of God. You have to understand that hope is built on whom God is, not what life is like! And when I say that He is the God of hope, I am saying that He is the source of hope that will never fade in strength. Voice your doubts, relate your doubts, but don’t stay in your doubts. Let your doubts move you to the God of hope. And remember whom God is no matter how life may be.

You can praise the Lord even when things are hard, even when you don’t understand. Praise is faith turned inside out. When you come to church, it may seem that other people are happy, go-lucky individuals without problems that weight them down. That’s not true. What is true is that we all come with common hurts, needs, discouragements, disappointments and doubts. But we lift our voice in praise because God is worthy of our praise. We focus on Him, not what life is like. We worship Him!

**Hope Enables Us to Experience Recovery from Defeat**

Peter was one of the great and best-known disciples of Jesus. And yet, Peter was a man who ultimately failed the Lord.

When we read about Peter in John 21. Jesus appeared on the seashore of Galilee. Jesus was cooking breakfast. The disciples had been out... they'd been fishing and they came back in and there Peter was with Jesus, standing by a fire.

The last time as best I know Peter was standing by a fire, a young lady looked up and said, "Weren't you with Jesus? Weren't you one of His followers? Weren't you the guy who was standing there? Weren't you the one who was always in every town with Him?" And you know what Peter did? He said, "No, it's not me. Oh, no, no, no. You got me wrong!" And then the Bible says he literally cursed and said, "I never knew the Man!" The last time Peter was standing by a fire with Jesus, he denied the Lord 3 times.

But here he's standing by a fire and Jesus has got fish cooking on those open coals and Jesus never looks up; He just said, "Peter, do you love Me?" Do you know how many times Jesus asked him the question? Three times You know how many times Peter had denied the Lord? Three times. And here's Peter standing there with Jesus... total shame and dejection, not able to say, "Lord, You know You can count on me!"

Oh before it was always, "Jesus, count on me! I'll go with You! I'll do whatever!" Not this time. Peter couldn't even bring himself to say the same word. He couldn't say, "Jesus, I love you." He basically said, "Lord, you know... I really like you a lot; I really care a lot about You." Peter had experienced defeat in his life. Peter was a failure, and nowhere did he feel like a bigger failure than standing there next to Jesus as the smoke was in his eyes and as Jesus asked Him the question, "Peter, do you love Me?" You see, hope enables us to experience recovery from defeat. What's your defeat? Where's the place of failure for you?

I love the game of baseball. I love to watch games and to watch the players and to be a part of all that happens. And to many people I know baseball can kind of be laborious and just kind of goes on. It can be slow. But then, boy, when the action starts happen, it's incredible! And there's no time when it's more incredible than when there's a play at the plate. When someone's pressing down the third base line, and a throw is coming in from the outfield, and you're wondering, "Is the runner going to make the play or is the catcher going to make the play?" And time and time again there comes that moment when a runner has given it his all and he's coming down the line and the catcher catches and goes straight down and makes the tag, and suddenly in the midst of the dust, you hear the umpire say, "You're out!" And one side of the fans are cheering and the other side feel complete dejection, and no where is that bigger than when it would have been the game tie or the game win, and suddenly a loss is known.

You know what it's like to be called out? Do you know what it's like to come down the line that you thought was going to be a line of success, a line of opportunity... a... a line of victory in your life, and suddenly to find yourself, when the dust clears, laying on the

ground and feeling like what everybody knows, and everybody's heard is that "he's out... she's out!"?

That's what Satan's doing to some of you right now. Some of you get up every day and the only thing you hear in your ear, in your mind, in your heart is Satan saying to you, "You're out, you're out, you're out!" And you replay it over and over and over again.

Yes, you may have failed; and yes, you may have had some disappointment; and yes, it may have brought doubt; and yes, you may be living with defeat! But the God of hope has hope to give you even if you failed! And God is not to leave you in the dust of failure! Because just like He did with Peter, He's going to pick you up. He by His grace is going to cover you. He's going to recommission you, and He's going to use you again. If only through the power of the resurrection of Christ, you will come and put your hope in the Lord.

The problem is we want our hope to be in ourselves. We want our hope to be in our circumstances. We put our hope in others. The Bible says put your hope in the Lord.

There's one final place where we need hope...(No, this isn't a 3 point message... it's a 4 point.) [laughter]... and that is that hope promises us victory over death. Could I remind you the context of everything I've been reading to you out of John 20 and 21 was all set against the backdrop of the death of Jesus Christ? That Jesus died, and the reason that each of these were dealing with difficulties and problems in their lives was because ultimately they had tasted the bitterness of death. And the one that they loved they had seen come, the Son of God, the Messiah. They saw Him beaten, they saw Him crucified! Jesus was put on the cross. But why did Jesus the Son of God come from heaven, become one of us and die on the cross? For one simple reason: That He might taste death for every one of us in order that He might destroy the power of death and give us the hope of life.

You see, to be a Christian is to know that there's hope beyond the grave! Life is not about living and existing and gaining and gathering and when it's all said and done, they put you in a six foot box, six foot under, and that's it! Life is about a hope [tap]! A hope that is eternal in Jesus Christ! And even if you face death, whether it's a young death, an unexpected death, a long-term progressive illness that leads to death... whenever you face death, the one thing that you can know in Christ, the God of hope, is that you can have hope even in the face of death.

That's why Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13:

13) We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep (those who have died) that you may not grieve as those who have no hope.

The Bible doesn't say you're not going to grieve. To be human is to grieve. To love someone deeply is to hurt deeply when they die. Don't ever get the idea that being a Christian means that someone dies and you go "Well, praise God, they're in heaven.

They're in a better place! That's just great! Praise God!" There's something wrong with you if you can do that. [light laughter] You're not living in reality. You need to see a counselor.

People who are hurting and are struggling with grief are fine; grief is a part of life. God gave us tears and God gave us laughter, and they're both a part of the salve of the soul. But the Bible says that when we grieve we don't grieve as those who have no hope. Listen to what Paul said in Ephesians. He said [Ephesians 2:11-12]:

11) Remember... 12) that you are once in time separated from Christ... having no hope without God in the world.

If you don't have God, you don't have hope! If you don't know Christ, you don't have hope! And the way that most people go through this life is living without hope in this world! But Jesus gives hope. And our God is the God of hope. And while hope does not take away hurt, hope endures even in the deepest hurts of life.

Several days ago I came back across an article that I had clipped and saved several years ago involving the testimony of a lady who had been married to a man for 28 years. It was a wonderful marriage. He was an upstanding man in the community. He was a faithful leader in the church. He was a good husband; a good father. He was a teacher in a local high school. But suddenly at the prime of life a darkness began to come over his soul. Somehow a deep psychological distress and depression began to capture his mind and heart and he went deeper and deeper into this darkness in his life. It was a horrible thing; it was a shameful thing to the family. He'd been a man of faith. He'd been a... a man of success, and yet now he was living with the... the reality, the depression and other psychological afflictions had taken over. They began to medicate this man and the result of the medication was that it only altered his behavior more. Ultimately they... they went to shock treatments and ... and brought about all kinds of very disturbing images and experiences in this man's life. But for all of the people who prayed and all of the things that were done to... to try to... to see the course turn, this man continued a long-term battle with severe psychiatric problems.

In her testimony she said: "In the midst of all this, I had to set the rudder of my will... (I love that phrase) I had to set the rudder of my will. In order to determine the direction of this experience and to help me to remember God's faithfulness, I constructed some visual reminders."

She said, "I framed our wedding photo, including a cross with entwinings of rings that topped the wedding cake 28 years earlier, and I hung them on the bedroom wall. And many times at night, crying myself to sleep, I would lay in that bed alone and look up at that picture and see that cross and I would say, 'Our hope is in the risen Lord who began this marriage. And as long as He is present, there is reason for hope.'"

I don't know what your hurt may be today. Maybe you're not hurting. Maybe life's really good for you. But I want you to know that our God is a God of hope. And His hope is

extended and is ministered to all who have need and desire to experience and to taste of today. The book of Lamentations says it this way [Lamentations 3]:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. 23) They are new [tap]... (listen to this) ...every [tap] morning [tap]. Great is Your faithfulness.

Every morning includes today. Did you know that? It includes today. His mercies never come to an end. And the God of hope is a God who offers you hope for every point of need in your life. And so I ask you today, do you have this hope in your heart... do you have this hope in your heart?

Father, I thank You today. I thank You for the testimony of Scripture. I thank You for the hope and the encouragement that it gives. And I pray that today, right here, right now in this moment that there would be men and women and boys and girls who would look to the God of hope to be the source of their help and of their strength. That they would find the hope of salvation in Christ, that they would find the hope of a new beginning through Your grace and mercy [music begins]. And Lord, where there is the touch of disappointment and of doubt, Lord, where there is defeat and even those who are needing comfort from death, I pray that You would renew hope in this place today. And I pray that today if we hear Your voice that we would not harden our hearts, but that we would embrace the hope... the hope that is found in Jesus in whose name we pray. AMEN

I want you to look up and as you look up I want to ask that no one be leaving. This is a very important moment. Before we walk out these doors today in just reengage the activities of life, I want to invite anyone who is here to have a hope revival in your life. I want to let this be a moment in your life with you and God, with you and your family, with you in this place where God can give you hope for the future. You don't have to live in this world without hope. You don't have to be a victim of circumstances and living at the hand of fate. You can know that there's a God who loves you, who has a plan for you. That's why Jesus came, that you might know the reality of your Creator-God, that you might be redeemed, forgiven, cleansed from your sins and your past, and that you might know what it is to live with hope every day.

And today if you want to know that hope... if we can help you with that hope, we're going to close in a moment by standing and singing together a song of invitation and when we do that, pastors are going to be standing there in the balcony at the railway, and they're going to be standing right here at the front with me. They're not here to point you out, embarrass you, turn you around, say "Hey, I've got one over here!" They are here this morning... they're here today to say, "How can we help you? How can we pray for you? How can we give you something to help you to know this hope?" And today we want you to leave with that hope in your life.

If you're a believer and you have this hope, may I say to you that you need the hope that is built up through being a part of a congregation... a family of God. Far too many

people today are trying to self-navigate their faith. What do I mean by that? They're simply trying to say, "Well, I'll go to this service and I'll go to this Bible study and I'll just kind of put a few things together and I'll keep faith strong and hope alive in my life."

Don't do that... just don't do that. This isn't about a cafeteria experience to Christianity. God puts us in a community called the church. And this is a community... a family of hope. And together we come together and build up one another in faith and we strengthen our hope together as we minister love, faith and hope to one another.

And so I invite you to become a part of Prestonwood today. Just come, speak with one of the ministers here or there in the balcony. Now clearly if you're in the balcony don't come down here. You don't need to. You can... but right there behind you or right below you those pastors are there, and they want to help you; they want to receive you today. And these guys who are here are here to do the same.

And so now in faith, with hope and knowing of God's love I ask you to stand with me and I ask us to sing, to pray or to come, while I pray that you will respond...