

PBC20070722AM2

## Hope Endures

### I Corinthian 13:13

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

#### [Dr. McKinley, message, Hope Endures]

[applause] That's a great young man, living witness to a great God. Who is there? You are there. And may I say to you as we gather in this place, He is here. It's not simply something that is past; it is present. God is here; and He is working in this place and He is giving witness through His Word and through His Spirit to the hearts and lives of all of us who hear today. And I pray that He will minister to your heart strength and encouragement as we gather.

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. We see this often in slogans. On the side of the sidelines of the football field you often hear: "Go! Fight! Win!" Well, actually you just saw it in the title of this song. "You Were There." I responded by saying "He is here." And so so many times whether we realize it or not, we put things in threes because of the way that it helps to present them and helps to communicate them to others.

Certainly those in the motion picture industry dis... have discovered this and know this to be true. How many times have you watched movies that came as trilogies? Certainly it was true of the great Star War series that we had the first episode that began the original episodes, and there were three [tap] of those. And then the prequels[tap], and there were three [tap] of those. The Lord of the Rings came out and there were three [tap] on the trilogy in the Lord of the Rings. And so we've seen this repeated time and time and time again.

And then we have to remember that throughout our lives we've been reminded of this. We've learned of the Three Musketeers, the Three Blind Mice, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Three Stooges, and Three Little Pigs. Speaking of pigs, what about a BLT? Sounds pretty good right now, doesn't it? [laughter] Maybe before you arrived this morning you had some cereal that goes "snap, crackle, pop". [laughter] You all know that if there's ever a story inv... involving a genie, how many wishes do you get? Three wishes. And by the way the Aladdin series was a trilogy as well, if you didn't know that. Even when it comes to preaching, preaching has often been reduced in the modern age to being called "three points and a poem." We've been accused of that from the pulpit.

[In] Fact speaking of preaching, I heard about a preacher who decided that in order to try to encourage the congregation, especially in the area of giving, that as he approached the pulpit one Sunday to challenge the church

to give, he decided that he would put a little extra challenge out there, and this is what he said. He said, "I need to make you aware that our church budget is running a little bit behind. We need to have a day where we catch up and we need to have a day where we're all encouraged to give." And he said, "So here's what I'm going to do. I'm just going to put a little bit of a motivation out there. Whoever gives the most in the offering this morning will be able to choose 3 hymns in worship today."

Well, they passed the plates, they finished, they brought the offering back to the front of the church to a little table that was there and the pastor went down and started looking through the offering plate, and right there he found an envelope that had thousand dollars in it. He picked up the offering envelope. He noticed that there was no name on it. And he said, "I have somebody who's given an offering envelope with \$1000. This is the largest gift given today." He said, "Who gave this \$1000?" And as he looked around the congregation there was a lady sitting right at the very back. She lifted up her hand very slowly and very sheepishly. He spotted her and said, "Oh, Miss Ruthie, Ruthie, come down here."

Ruthie was a little bit embarrassed but she got up and made her way down to the front of the church. And when she got there, he said, "Ruthie, I so appreciate your generosity to our church today. And I did promise that whoever gave the largest gift would be able to choose 3 hymns." He said, "What 3 hymns would you like?" She looked around, found the 3 most handsome men in the church and said, "I'll take him and him and him!" [laughter] Now that's the worst thing you'll hear in this message today! [laughter] But things come in threes. I think you're beginning to get the point.

But you know, it's even true in the Scripture. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13... I invite you to turn there with me to begin our message today... we have the testimony of love. I would suggest that possibly outside of Psalm 23, this may be the best known passage of Scripture in the Bible. Not so much that people can quote it all, but that people really appreciate the description of love that is found in 1 Corinthians 13: what love is like and how love is lived. But at the close of this great chapter, the love chapter of the Bible, the Apostle Paul closes with these words, and this is what he says... 1 Corinthians 13 and verse 13.

*13) So now faith, hope and love abide, these (what?) three; but the greatest of these is love. ... And now faith, hope and love abide, these three...*

When Paul wanted to condense the Christian life down to 3 simple words, he said all of the Christian life can be described as faith, hope and love. The essence of Christian virtue can be compressed into these words: faith, hope and love.

We said last week that faith is where it all begins. You become a Christian by faith. You don't work to gain or earn your salvation. Salvation is a gift you receive by faith. Grace has provided it and paid for it... the grace of God. But faith is the operational principle by which any one of us

becomes a child of God. We enter a relationship with God by faith. And that's why my message last week was entitled "Faith Matters." Faith matters... it's how you begin the Christian life; it's how you live the Christian life.

And last Sunday in my message I said that faith matters because grace demands it (number 1), life requires it (number 2), and God accepts it (number 3). It was a three part sermon. (ha) [light laughter] (not a poem though) Faith, hope and love. And so today we focus on the second aspect of that and it was the area of hope.

Someone has said that the greatest enemy of man is not disease; it is despair. The greatest enemy of man is not disease; it is despair. And for all the fun and for all of the attention and interest that I can gain by talking about the rule of 3 and how that relates to all of us in life, there's a rule of much greater magnitude and proportion that relates to every heart, and that is that every one of us needs the rule of hope in our lives. We have a need to know that there's hope because all of our existence is based and built upon a heart that has a hope. And we need hope to cope in life. Why? Because life is filled with so many repeated hope-depleting and hope-eclipsing experiences. And we need hope to cope.

I was driving to work one day this week and I turned a corner and noticed a vehicle... a very nice vehicle that was off on the side of the road, and there I noticed that the emergency lights were flashing, and that there was a flat tire. You've had that experience, I've had that experience. No fun to have a flat, but then the closer I looked, I realized there was not just one flat, but 2 flats on the same side of the car.

And I thought, boy, that's how life is, isn't it? You know some of us can cope with the fact that we have a flat... we've got a spare. But we don't always have 2 spares, do we? And sometimes we find that life can be an experience that not only brings to us the experience of something we ... that's an interruption like a flat tire... Sometimes life brings to us a... a complete diversion... 2 flat tires and not enough spares to go around. And that's how life can be.

Now if that was you, I apologize for passing you this week on my way to work but... [laughter] I was busy preparing a message on hope [much more laughter] and I didn't have time to talk to you. But I looked at that and I thought how true that is of life [tap] because life continually brings us to a place where we struggle to find hope.

Now hope is one of the most visible, one of the most essential and vital words in the Bible. And nowhere do we find that word anymore prominently placed than in the Psalms. I love the Psalms because the Psalms give expression to human emotion. In many ways the Psalms are to the Scripture like country music is to our culture.

You know country music [tap]... it's just kinda from the depth. You kinda know how people feel, you know what's happened, you know where they're headed, you know the good... the ups and the downs, the goods and the bads. That's kinda how the Psalms are. They... they are an outpouring of the soul of a man before God, and yet they give expression to all of humanity; of where we are in worship in our worst times and in our best [tap] times.

That's why I love the words of the psalmist. Let me just give you one little section of Psalms. I don't want you to turn to it... there's not enough time... but I want you to read this with me with your eyes, and when I get to the word *hope*, I want you to say it out loud. Can we do that together? I want you to help me proclaim this hope today. Listen:

[Psalms 119:43]

43) *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for my hope is in Your rules.*

[Psalms 119:49]

49) *Remember Your word to Your servant in which you have made me hope.*

[Psalms 119:74]

74) *Those who fear You shall see me and rejoice because I have hoped in Your word.*

[Psalms 119:81]

81) *My soul longs for Your salvation, I hope in Your word.*

[Psalms 119:114]

114) *You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.*

[Psalms 119:116]

116) *Uphold me according to Your promise that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope.*

[Psalms 119:147]

147) *I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in Your words [word].*

[Psalms 130:5]

5) *I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I hope.*

Over and over the psalmist gives expression to this hope, this hope that he has in life; this hope that he has in the midst of struggle and difficulty and heartache and pain. The psalmist says, "I have hope!" And what he is saying is true of you and of me... each of us, we all need this hope to cope in life.

Now having looked at the Psalms and having started in 1 Corinthians, I want you to turn just a few pages back from 1 Corinthians to the book of Romans, chapter 15, because here again we learn some things about this hope that endures in life. And I want you to see what the Scripture tells us. We hear what's being said, but let's see what the Scripture tells us and how we can

embrace this hope. First... rather, Romans 15 and verse 4; the Scripture says:

4) *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction...*

Whatever you read in here, it was written for you. It comes from yesterday. It tells us that he was there, but it is for here and now, and you and me.

4) *And whatever was written before was written for our instruction, (why?) that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have (what?) hope.*

Then look down in verse 13. Paul was praying for the church in Rome and he said:

13) *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.*

You know that's been my prayer today. My prayer in the preparation of this message has been that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because I know that you need hope and that I need hope, but if we are to have hope then there's a principle that we must see... there is a truth that we must capture this morning. And it is simply this: that it all begins with the God of hope.

Note that Paul says: "May the God of hope..." That is, that the source of hope, that the strength of hope is in the Lord. Why is that so important? Well, it's important for one simple reason. The source [tap] of your hope [tap] will determine [tap] the strength [tap] of your hope [tap]. If the source of your hope is right then the strength of your hope will be sufficient. But if the source of your hope is wrong then your hope will fade and your hope will fail.

That's why when I talk to you about hope from a biblical perspective I'm not talking about hype. Worship services are not intended just to get believers together and build us up in a hype! There's a difference between hype and hope. You can hype yourself up with positive thinking. Some people put their hope in their positive thoughts. In fact to most people in our culture, if you ask them what hope is, they will say it is a positive attitude; it's wishful thinking; it's hoping for the best, believing the best. But the question is what's the source of your hope?

I can have a great positive attitude... I can have positive thinking, but if all that I have is positive thinking, as soon as I have a negative circumstance, it's not going to be long until positive thinking is eclipsed by negative experiences and the source of my hope, my thinking will be turned to the focus of my circumstance, that's my struggle; and instead of having hope, I will be defeated. And a lot of people are living in that kind of defeat in life. And sadly a lot of people are attending churches hoping that they can get some form of a spiritual hype but they never get hope!

But Paul said it's clear. "The God of hope" will give you strength. And when your hope is rightly focused and founded, it will change your life. That's why we have the witness of Scripture. When you read the Scripture you do read about Abraham and Moses and Joshua; Samson and David and Solomon. You go to the New Testament and there you find Peter, Paul, and Mary. Well not exactly in that order but they're there! [laughter] And when you read [tap] the Scriptures [tap] you have [tap] in the witness [tap] of Scripture [tap] the confidence of who God is and how God works in human circumstances.

You see, that's why God has given us this Book. That's why I open this Book to you today. I can't give you hope in life. This church can't give you hope in life. There's not anybody that can give you hope apart from the God of hope, and it's that God that I can speak to you about today, because He loves you and He cares for you, and He knows your hurt and 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.

So let's look at the witness of Scripture today. Let's look at a living testimony of how hope plays itself out in the lives of believers, and that this God of hope touches people at points of need and of hurt. Turn back from Romans 15 to the Gospel of John, chapter 20... Gospel of John, chapter 20.

As you open the twentieth chapter of ah... the Gospel of John, it's a dark chapter. It's dark because it actually takes place before daylight. It's actually physically dark. But it was also a dark time in the lives and in the hearts of Christ-followers, those who had been the most innermost circle of Jesus' life and ministry were completely overwhelmed and completely distraught with the fact that the One that they had loved, the One they had followed, the Miracle worker, the One who had had such an approval of the people suddenly had had a backlash, and the result was that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to love and care and heal and forgive, was ultimately shamed [tap] and spit upon [tap], beaten [tap] and crucified on a Roman cross. And the reality of the death of Christ and the sorrow of the death of Christ had great impact on these early followers. And here we see the morning as things begin to unfold. The Bible tells us in John 20:

*1) Now on the first day of the week (That would have been Sunday on the Jewish calendar; this day many years ago.) Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2) And so she ran and told Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they've laid Him."*

Suddenly Mary is faced with the reality of it. She's there and to add to her grief, there is this great disappointment that Jesus is gone! The body's gone! The Bible goes on to tell us a little bit about what happened in the midst of... of these moments. And then it tells us down in verse 11 that:

11) ... *Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.*

And then she went on, having been there and looked in the tomb and though she actually, the Bible tells us, saw some angels, she was still so overcome, both with grief and with frustration that Jesus wasn't there, that she saw a man that she thought was actually the gardener. And she said to the gardener, "Sir, do you know what they have done with Jesus? His body is gone." But the Bible tells us that when she said that to whom she supposed to be the gardener, that He opened His mouth and He spoke to her and He simply said... the Bible says in verse 16, "Mary!"

It was Jesus! She didn't recognize Him! Overcome by grief and suddenly faced with the disappointment that Jesus wasn't there, Mary was just completely distraught in life and completely out of control in life, and completely rejected! But suddenly in the midst of all of this Jesus called her name, "Mary" And suddenly everything changed.

Suddenly she realized that she was in the presence of Jesus, and that He was not dead; that He was alive, and that all hope was not lost, but that hope had been reborn. And in this moment when I see Mary in that place, I'm reminded of a common place that you and I go on a regular basis and it's simply this: that we need hope to help us cope with the reality of disappointment... We need hope to help us cope with the reality of disappointment.

What was wrong with Mary? She was completely devastated and disappointed because things were not the way she had hoped they would be. And even in grief she was dealing with being overwhelmed by this sense of disappointment. "Where is Jesus? What have they done with Him!"

Have you faced disappointment in your life? Have you had a day in your life where you started, and it very immediately apparent that life wasn't going to be the way you expected it to be, that things were out of order and that you were finding yourself having to deal with anxiety and frustration and the struggle of an inner emotion, of just declining because you were disappointed. That's exactly where Mary was. All of her hopes, all of her dreams had been dashed in the death of Christ, and now the disappointment that Jesus wasn't there!

That's how we feel, isn't it? Don't you feel disappointed when suddenly you're faced with a financial crisis in your life that you didn't expect? Don't you feel disappointed when suddenly you get a medical [tap] report that you thought [tap] you were healthy and [tap] you're not? Don't you know what it is to be disappointed when somebody you love [tap] let's you [tap] down [tap] and doesn't do what you expected them to do in a relationship? Don't you know that disappointment in your life? We all knew... all know that disappointment. And the only thing that gives us the hope to cope is the reality of hope that we can find in Christ.

Mary wasn't alone in this. Over in the book of Luke 24... don't turn there... but in the book of Luke 24, the Bible tells us that some of the disciples were on a road called the road to Emmaus and they walked along, talking about Jesus that day. And here's what they said to Him... they didn't recognize Him either, but they were expressing their disappointment. They said:

*21) But we had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel; yes, and besides all this, it is not... is it not the third day since all these things happened.*

"We thought He was the right Messiah! We thought He was going to let Israel go free from the oppression of the Romans! We thought he was going to be a political leader! And then on top of that He said that if He died that He would rise on the third day and here it is the third day and we don't see Him!" Disappointed! Life is filled with disappointments! Things that don't work out, turn out, or end up the way we wanted them. Here's what I want you to hear this morning. It may be that the very place of your disappointment is the place that God is calling your name.

Years ago an old Baptist preacher named Vance Havener used to say, "Disappointments, His appointments... Disappointments, His appointments." And the very place in my life where I find myself disappointed may be the very place, the very moment, the very time that I need to know that He is calling my name! Just as He called Mary, He's calling you. He's speaking to you through this word today. He's speaking to you by His Spirit today. He's calling your name because He loves you and He cares for you.

Jesus wasn't playing hide and seek. They just weren't looking... they weren't listening... they didn't see it from the right perspective. And that's what disappointment is, isn't it? It's when I thought I'd see it one way, and I see it 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.

But there's something else, and that's found over in John chapter 20, beginning in verse 24. Here we meet one of the best known disciples of Jesus. His name is Thomas. Now you don't have to be a Bible scholar to know this. What do you know about Thomas? Who is Thomas? We call him what? Doubting Thomas.

How would you like to bear that nickname? [laughter] How would you like it if every time I passed you in the halls of the church... "Hey... hey, Doubter. Hey, Doubter. How you doing, Doubter?" [laughter] Wouldn't you just love it if everybody said, "We have a group of believers and we have a couple of doubters, and there is one. He's a doubter, she's a doubter."? Wouldn't you love to be known as the doubter? I mean, for all time Thomas's testimony is recorded in Scripture. He's a doubter. Doubting Thomas.



Let me ask you something. Have you ever doubted God? Let's be honest. Have you ever doubted God? Let's listen to what the testimony of Scripture says about Thomas here in John 20 and verse 24:

*24) Now Thomas, one of the twelve called the twin was not with them when Jesus came. 25) So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand in His side, I will not believe."*

"I can't believe this! I can't do this! I don't understand this!" Have you ever been there? Oh, I know. It's always great... Pastor stands up in church and says, "Hey, who has a testimony of faith. Do you have a testimony of faith?" And a lot of people want to lift their hands and say they have a testimony of faith. Let me ask you to be honest this morning. Do any of you have a testimony of doubt? Have you ever doubted God? Tell me. Have you? I have.

"Oh, but Christians aren't supposed to doubt!" Where did you ever get that idea? You do 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 have a hard time without letting doubts come to us. And let me tell you, there's a difference between honest doubters and dishonest doubters.

Honest doubters are willing to admit they doubt and to bring it to God and ultimately to find help and hope in Him. Dishonest doubters are just using doubt as an excuse... a smokescreen to be able to try to stay away from faith. There are a lot of people who are dishonest doubters. They use their intellect, they use the sense of materialism, they... they use philosophy and facts in life to try to take them to a place where they say I don't believe, I just doubt.

Why I use facts, I use the facts and the evidence of the Word [tap] of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and thousands and millions [tap] of people [tap] whose lives have been transformed across the years of history. The accuracy of this Book, the integrity of this Book, and I [tap] have a reason [tap] to believe [tap]! Even then I still struggle with doubt.

Now can I tell you something? God is not intimidated when you doubt. Did you know that? He's bigger than your doubts. God's not intimidated. Some of us seem to think that if we doubt, God's going to cringe over in the corner of heaven... "Oh, I'm just so intimidated. They don't believe." God's not like that. God is so much bigger than your doubts. God sees and knows so much more than you and I see and know in life. And ultimately we just have to get honest with God that there are times in life when the hurt, the heartache, the struggle makes us doubt.

Years ago author and Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll, pastor in this area, wrote a little booklet and in that booklet he identified three things that make us doubt. I love this. He said:

I doubt in life when things I believe should never happen, happen... things I believe should never happen, happen. Disease, divorce, death. So many things fuel the cells of doubt in my life. And these circumstances and experiences can cause me to doubt, especially when I think that things should never happen, happen and they happen to me. Oh, I know they happen to others, but they shouldn't happen to me.

There's another time we doubt in life and that's when 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 your desk?"

Have you had those kind of feelings in life? Have you struggled with those moments in life? Times when you thought that things should happen and they never happened! And you couldn't understand it and you couldn't explain it and frankly, you are afraid, like the psalmist, that you are going to be put to shame because you had hoped in the Lord and in His word. Have you been there? Are you there today?

You see, I doubt when things that I think should never happen, happen; and I doubt when things I think should never... should happen, never happen. And then I doubt when things that I want to happen now, happen 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? And why the... why the invasion and the struggle?

You see, these are the times of life when we struggle with doubt. And what is it that gets me through these doubts? It is my hope in the Lord. You see, life presents us with a challenge and the challenge is, is when I have difficult circumstances, am I going to equate the character of God to the rightness of my circumstances? So many times we want to equate God's character to the rightness of my circumstances! And there are sometimes when the circumstances of life just aren't right! Everything is upside down.

But that doesn't change who God is. That doesn't change what God is doing. It doesn't change His love for you. It doesn't change His faithfulness. It doesn't change His mercy. It doesn't fade the testimony of Scripture because if you [tap] will read [tap] carefully [tap], every person who is known for their faith was first a person who was known for their doubt, because they struggled with the doubts of life. And we struggle with that as well, trying to understand what it means to trust the Lord.

Circumstances are not an accurate picture about which you can measure the character of God. And so you have to know God's character. You have to know His word! You have to understand that hope is built on who God is, not what

life is like! And when I say that He is the God of hope, I'm talking about to you the one source of hope that will never fade in strength when you put your hope in Him. 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 who God is no matter how life may be.

And that's why we can praise the Lord even when things are hard, even when we don't understand; because praise is nothing more than faith turned inside out. That's what it is. It's faith turned inside out. And when I come to church and life isn't the way it ought to be and everybody else seems happy and go-lucky and no problems... that's not true. What's true is that we've all come here with common hurts and needs and discouragements and disappointments and doubts. But we lift our voice in praise because God is worthy of praise and we focus on who He is and not what life is like. That's what worship is.

There's a third thing that we need to see and that's not only what we see of Mary here, and what we see of Thomas, but if you keep reading through John 20 and on over into John 21, you find another very colorful figure in Scripture and that's Peter... Peter. One of the great disciples of Jesus! One of the ones that's best known. And yet the reality of Peter's life is that Peter was a man who ultimately failed the Lord.

When we read about him here in John 21 what we're reading is the morning that Jesus came and appeared on the seashore of Galilee. He 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...