

When Hope is Hard

Preached: 5/17/2020

Video Message during Pandemic

Welcome to Germantown Church of God, in Cascade, MD. I am Mark Hosler. I am the pastor here at Germantown Church. I am happy that you are watching today. We have finally enjoyed several spring like days, with beautiful sunshine and warmth. The warmth and sunshine always seem to fill our hearts with hope and optimism. And we certainly have needed that. The Covid 19 virus continues to affect our country, and we want to continue to follow guidelines in order to protect ourselves and protect others. Some businesses are beginning to re-open and it looks like Churches will be able to resume services soon. We here at Germantown Church will continue to monitor the situation and we hope we will be able to share information soon about when we will be able to do that. I am planning to continue to offer these online messages even after we resume face to face gatherings. Please check in on our Church Website (www.germantowncog.org) and our Facebook page (Germantown Church of God) for information and updates about our plans here at Germantown Church. As we continue in this time of following practices to Stay Safe, I encourage you to **check in with friends**. Reach out with a phone call. Continue to offer assistance to one another as there are needs, and as you are able. Offer to make grocery store runs, or offer to run errands. If someone needs food, please let us know. This is not a time to leave others behind. Jesus teaches us that the Greatest Commandment is to **“Love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength and a second commandment is equal to it – Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

I want to continue to encourage you, if you have a need or a concern for prayer, please contact me. We do take praying for one another seriously and we would like to do what we can to support you in a time of need, or in a time of worry. We do have a Prayer Gathering by telephone on Thursday evenings at 7:00. It has become a time for fellowship and praying together. If you would like to be a part of that, please contact me for the dial in information.

Opening Scripture: Psalm 20

Prayer:

Promise – Is. 26:3

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 1:2-11

Message: When Hope is Hard

Joni Eareckson Tada is a quadriplegic. She broke her neck diving in shallow water when she was just a teenager. She is now in her 60's and has spent her life paralyzed in a wheel chair. When bad things happen, Joni suggests that everyone has a choice to make – **Get busy living, or get busy dying**. While she was in the hospital following her accident, she needed to have several surgeries on her back and neck. She shares about that time with these words.

I remember the time when I was once busy dying. It wasn't long after I had broken my neck in a diving accident that I spent one particularly hopeless week in the hospital. I had endured long surgeries to shave down the bony prominences on my back, and it was a long recovery. I had lost a great deal of weight. And for almost three weeks I was forced to lie facedown on what's called a Stryker frame — a long, flat canvas sandwich where they put you faceup for three hours and then strap another piece of canvas on you and flip you facedown to lie there for another three hours.

Trapped facedown, staring at the floor hour after hour, my thoughts grew dark and hopeless. All I could think was, “Great, God. Way to go. I'm a brand-new Christian. This is the way you treat your new Christians? I'm young in the faith. I prayed for a closer walk with you. If this is your idea of an answer to prayer, I am never going to trust you with another prayer again. I can't believe that I have to lie facedown and do nothing but count the tiles on the floor on this stupid torture rack. I hate my existence.” I asked the hospital staff to turn out the lights, close the blinds, close the door, and if anybody came in — visitor, parent, nurse — I just grunted. I

justified it all. I rationalized that God shouldn't mind that I would be bitter — after all, I was paralyzed. And I didn't care how much joy was set before me. This was one cross I was not going to bear without a battle.

In those dark days, Joni found that **Hope was Hard**. For the past few weeks we have been talking about some of the characteristics that we should display if we are followers of Jesus. I suggested that Christ's followers should be people who are characterized by faith, by a joyful heart, by a loving spirit, and by a peaceful heart. There is one more characteristic that I want us to think about – Hope. There is an expectation that believers in Jesus will have a bright, optimistic outlook about life and the future, no matter how bad the current situation is. After all, when Jesus rose from the dead, we learn that God can be victorious over the worst of our enemies. We believe in eternal life in heaven after our life in this world is over. We ought to be the most optimistic, hopeful people. BUT, as we have discovered throughout this series, sometimes life is hard and it is not always easy to be people who are filled with faith, joy, love, peace, or hope.

Sometimes **Hope is Hard**. In the Scripture passage that I read, the Apostle Paul writes about a time when his life had become so hard, that he despaired of life. He felt like he was under a death sentence. He writes that while he was in the province of Asia, he experienced great hardship and suffering. He does not give us the details of that suffering. We do know that Paul was often under attack by those who opposed his message. As a result of that opposition he was physically tortured, and imprisoned. We also know that on occasion Paul experienced sicknesses like dysentery. Whatever the circumstances, Paul became hopeless, expecting death. God's people are not exempt from difficulties. That surprises many believers as we saw in Joni's story. We have this expectation that because we have chosen to become Christians, God will protect us from all danger. But even for Christians, sometimes life is hard, and it is **Hard to have Hope**.

This pandemic has created situations that have made our lives difficult. Stay at home. Don't visit loved ones in hospitals or nursing homes. Don't go to work. Wear masks. And it has gone on for a long time – 8 weeks. And even though some states are beginning to open, there are still limitations on us that we must follow. Keep your distance. Wear a mask. No gathering in groups larger than 10 for at least the next few weeks.

And even though we will be able to resume some of our normal activities, there is no expectation that this pandemic crisis will be over soon. People will still get the virus. People will still die. Some health officials believe there will be a resurgence in the number of cases and deaths. Schools are closed for this year, and may not re-open in the fall. ***All of this has made it difficult for some people to be hopeful and optimistic. Right now, Hope is Hard.***

Let's talk a little bit about what Hope looks like: Webster's Dictionary defines hope this way:

- ***Hope is a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment***

So most people have that understanding of hope – an expectation that something we desire or expect is going to happen or come to us. When we don't get what we expect, or something happens to us contrary to what we expect, **we lose hope**. When that happens often enough, it tends to put us in a dark place. When people lose hope, their attitude begins to change, as Joni described in her story:

- ***Sad***
- ***Gloomy outlook – (Joni – turn the lights out)***
- ***Lose our will to live***
- ***Lethargic***
- ***Our attention is turned inward toward one's self***
- ***We don't want to be with others or have others near us***

The consequences of this hopelessness can be depression, short temper, thoughts of suicide

The Bible gives us another perspective on Hope. Not so much an expectation that we will get everything we long for. Biblical hope is rather an attitude of trust, confidence and refuge in God. Listen to the words of the Psalmist, **(Psalm 33:20-22)**

Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. ²¹ For our heart shall rejoice in Him, Because we have trusted in His holy name. ²² Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, Just as we hope in You.

Biblical hope is not focused so much on something that we long for. It is instead **an awareness** that God is with us, and is able to bring us through the difficult times that we face. In the Scripture text that we read, Paul experienced God's deliverance, and he now lived with an expectation that God continued to care for him. There was nothing what was going to come against him that was "Too big for God to handle."

Now we also learn in the Scriptures that sometimes the result that we hope for from God doesn't come in the way we would like. We may not get well. Joni is still in a wheel chair. She has had several battles with cancer. But she is one of the most positive and optimistic people I have ever heard of. She believes that ultimately she will experience victory. It may not be in this life, but God will give her a victory over all that she has struggled with in this world when He brings her to heaven.

Let me share one final lesson from this text that we read. The question remains – **Why do we go through these hard times?** As we put our trust in God and put our hope in Him, we learn that God will use the difficulties that we experience for His purposes. Paul makes that point in this passage. Vs. 9 – ***But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*** God wants us to live our lives completely through His resources. Whenever we find ourselves in a difficult situation, we may try to maneuver and figure out a way to deliver ourselves. But Paul was in a situation where he had no where else to turn. He could only trust God to deliver Him and as a result **His faith became stronger**. He believed that God used his time of suffering in order to make him stronger.

There was a second result that Paul discovered when he learned to trust only in God. God could use his suffering to ministry to others.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

So, if you find yourself in a dark place today, where you have lost hope, I encourage you to understand that God is stronger than anything we are facing. And he is able to deliver us and accomplish His purpose in our lives. God can use what you are going through to strengthen your faith and to give you an opportunity to help others. And remember that God assures you of ultimate victory and deliverance.

Prayer

Invitation: God offers us the promise of eternal life. It is our ultimate victory over suffering and hardship in this world. Living with Him for all eternity. If you do not have that sense of certainty that you will go to be in the Lord's presence after you die, I encourage you today to invite Jesus to be your Savior. Turn from your own agenda, repent of our sin, believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin and submit to Him as your Savior and Lord.