

The Building Blocks of Faith: I have hope.
September 22, 2019

Opening question: What is “biblical hope”? How is it different from optimism?

Romans 8:22-39,”²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(See also Lamentations 3:19-33)

Discussion questions:

Is it difficult for you to embrace hope?

How do the building blocks of “I belong” and “I have hope” work together?

In what ways do hope and suffering co-exist?

How do we reconcile hope with suffering?

The following excerpt is from a 2016 blog by Brian Keepers:



Some time ago a good friend introduced me to the West African word “*sankofa*.” In the Anken language of Ghana, *sankofa* literally means, “looking backward to move forward.” *Sankofa* is also a word picture—a symbol of a bird in traditional African art. The bird has its head turned backwards while holding an egg (representing the future) in its beak. It’s a powerful symbol of the truth that we move into the future by looking back into the past.

Jamie Smith (Calvin College) puts it this way: “When Christians remember, we are not retreating to the past; we are being catapulted toward the future. God’s people inhabit time in this strange tension, where we are called to remember so that we can *hope*. When Jesus enjoins us to eat and drink in remembrance of the Last Supper, he also points us toward the future: we celebrate the Lord’s Supper ‘until he comes,’ and so the remembrance is really just a foretaste of that coming feast. Our traditions are the gifts that propel us toward the future with hopeful expectation. Christians inhabit time as a *stretched* people.”

Let’s just be clear: this is not a false hope that buries its head in the sand or squints with blind optimism. This is an authentic hope that stares the darkness squarely in the face and says, “No! The Light shines, and the darkness will not overcome it.” A hope that remembers the faithfulness of God in the past (and the good news that God *remembers* his covenant promises), and that means that the future holds possibilities beyond our own imagining. Or to borrow the pithy phrase of Karl Barth: Christian hope is “the impossible possibility.”

Questions for discussion:

We often think of hope as futuristic – how is hope also connected to the past?

How do you think sharing stories of God’s provision can change a congregation?

What are traditions our church has in place to keep us a “stretched people”?

What are practices you’ve established to consistently remind you to hope?

It has been said that hope is the greatest gift Christians have to give to the world. Do you agree or disagree?

As Christians we are people of hope. How should this affect our lives?

Closing Thought: Excerpt from Frederick Buechner’s “A room called remember”

“Hope stands up to its knees in the past and keeps its eyes on the future...The past and the future. Memory and expectation. Remember and hope. Remember and wait. Wait for him whose face we all of us know because somewhere in the past we have faintly seen it, whose life we all of us thirst for because somewhere in the past we have seen it lived, have maybe even had moments of living it ourselves. Remember him who himself remembers us as he promised to remember the thief who died beside him. To have faith is to remember and wait, and to wait in hope is to have what we hope for already begin to come true in us through our hoping. Praise him.”