

<u>THE INVITATION TO THOSE WHO ARE HOPEFUL</u>	Rev Christopher Harrison
Aim: To invite people to receive and transmit God's Hope	Scriptures: Matthew 19: 13-15, Revelation 22: 3-6 & Hebrews 6: 18-20

INTRODUCTION:

Illustration: In *Shawshank Redemption*, the two main characters Andy: a white banker incorrectly convicted of the killing of his wife and her lover, and Red, a murderer who had been in for 20 years already, had a conversation around the meal table. Andy had just come out of the 'hole' which is solitary confinement for two weeks for listening to Mozart and playing it through the PA system for the whole jail! When asked whether it was worth it, Andy says yes, because the music lives on in his head. He continues: "It's in there and no one can take it away from you, so that you don't forget." "Forget what?" asks Red. "Forget that there are places in the world that are not made of stone. That there's something inside that they don't get to, that they cannot touch, that's yours." Red asks: "What are you talking about?" "Hope", Andy says. Red replies: "Hope is a dangerous thing."

When we get older we just get used to things as they are; we get stuck. We have either checked out of a relationship, a job, or our future. However, Jesus had worked for 3 years with this bunch of disciples, and had preached to the city of Jerusalem so often, and must have despaired in their lack of response, slowness to learn, and often rebellious in their responses. Yet he went on despite the people, and his circumstances, because of hope!

Definition of Hope: We are speaking today about **HOPE**. "Hope is certainty in the present, and a firm expectation of a better future." Four things:

1. GOD'S PICTURE OF WHAT WE CAN HOPE FOR:

To what is Jesus referring when he says that "God's kingdom is made up of people like these". What does God's future then look like? What is picture we hope for? Revelation 21 says these things about the future:

- It is where God is experienced seen and known: vs 3: God dwells amongst people.
- It is a place of great fellowship with wonderful people: It is a city, many rooms: vs 1 A city
- It is full of prosperity: vs 6 Drinking abundantly without cost
- It is full of light, truth and transparency: There is no sin: vs vs 11: It shone with the glory of God.
- It is where wholeness is experienced: No tears and mourning: vs 27 Nothing impure enters
- It is where everyone belongs: Everyone is special and has a place: vss 13-14 All tribes are there.
- It is where everything works!: There is great synergy and flow: vss 15-21

2. HOPE OF PROMISED CHANGE FROM NOW, NOT WISHFUL THINKING

Note "One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them" Parents brought the children in hope. Children embody a willingness to learn new things, grow and change things. As we get older we tend to get stuck. We wish things were different, but we do little about it to. There is a difference between hope and wishful thinking: it is what we do with it! **Hope has two elements. The one is 'a desire or expectation' for something to occur. The second is usually 'grounds for believing' that change will occur.** Wishful thinking is likened to a loose desire that if the desired thing does not happen then we say: "Oh well, so much for that, it was a nice thought. Life's like that." Wishful thinking is a desire for something without any grounds. Hope, on the other hand, sees the picture of how things can be and are willing to pay the price of seeing it become reality. Hope is more than wishful thinking when it has real reasons to believe that things can be different and can change.

Illustration: The Alcoholic who realises their addiction, that life like this is utterly hopeless, and that he needs to radically change in order to actually live. He stops drinking all alcohol immediately, attends an AA meeting every day, keeps in contact with his AA buddy every day, learns new ways of coping with the triggers within his dependency and boldly and courageously learns new ways of really living. This person has understood hope.

Two things cause us to change: The fear of the negative, of what is, and the promise of the positive, a better future.

Hebrews 6:19-20 says: 'We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf...'

3. HOPE IS DESPAIR THAT HAS SAID ITS PRAYERS

When we look to the future and the faith as expressed in these generations, the latest study shows things are not good: In 10 years: There is a 9% drop in prayer among teenagers, a 6% drop in Bible engagement in 10 years, and a 5% drop in Church worship attendance!

The Bana Organisation research shows a huge disconnect with faith is evident in morality. Current generations are further from God than previous ones: This generation is 9 times more likely than Boomers to engage in sex in the last week. They are 6 times more likely to lie in the last 7 days. They are 3 times more likely to be drunk and gossiped. They are 2 times more likely to have seen pornography and engaged in retaliation in some form. Also, only 1 in 5 of '20 somethings' are remaining faithful to what they learned in the teenagers years. 61% of those were engaged and now are completely disconnected from Christ.

Note *"One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them **and pray over them**"* Are we wise with our hope? When we are wise we seek Jesus. We seek to let God change us and move into hope. Eddie Rickenbacker said: *"Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. This fear drives us to our knees."* Thomas Fuller (1608-1661) said: *"Fear can keep a man out of danger, but courage can support him in it."* **Psalm 50:15 says: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you will glorify me."** Have you said your prayers in your despair? Have we spent the time getting God's picture of the present and the future? Have we wrestled with what God has given as a promise? Prayer, retreat and meditation to let this sink deep into your soul, is imperative to claiming this promise. When we face a challenge this week or in our lives, we say to that challenge:

The key word here is prayer. We need courage for answered prayer. Sometimes it is harder to live into the positively answered prayers than the negatively answered prayers. When we get what we ask for this takes even more hope! Abraham got the child that he hoped for (Heb 6: 13), now he had to raise the kid who would become a teenager and a young adult and would challenge him each day! Jesus prayed for the Father will to be done in every part of his life. When the time came for him to face the future with all its pain and suffering, he did so with hope. Hope that this was temporary, and a short term phase, before the glory unfolds! Jesus went ahead of us, and because of Him we have this inheritance! We need to take the steps that move us in a direction that fulfills God's promises, and then allow him to meet that with his fulfilment. Where is that for you today? Where are your prayers being focussed? On your children. Your home, your careers, your relationships?

4. WE TAKE HOLD OF HOPE, BECAUSE GOD TAKES HOLD OF US

The promise is for a life of abundance, meaning and purpose for today and a life of real peace that never ends on the future. Promises come in words. We speak them all the time. However in our age, promises are weakened by our sin and brokenness. We break promises when we are broken by sin. In Galatians 3: 29 Paul says: *'And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.'* Scripture continues in Acts 2:39: *'For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'* Now this promise is God's BIG YES to His people and their lives for now and for the future. **2 Corinthians 1:20-22 (The Message) says: 'Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his Yes within us. By his Spirit, he has stamped us with his eternal pledge—a sure beginning of what he is destined to complete.'** This promise is backed up, not by anything temporary, but by God Himself. *Hebrews 6:13 says: 'For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself...'*

Illustration: In Shawshank Redemption we see Red content to stay in prison. Andy, though, is consumed with the fear of being trapped in a prison inside himself and clung to a knowledge of something better outside. In Shawshank

Redemption Andy leads a well planned dramatic escape. Andy then writes to Red a letter saying: "Hope is a good thing. Maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies."

God had taken hold of Abraham, and given him the promise and it shaped and determined his life. Jesus knew the promise that the Father would never abandon him, that he was the beloved Son, in whom the Father was well pleased. He is the 'overcomer', the victor, the champion. He will not let us go. We can take courage because of what Jesus has done. Claim the promise today, because God has taken hold of you. You are a person of a promise. We are prisoners of hope. The key word here is endurance. We are encouraged to keep going with an endurance inspired by hope. We too are to endure. We too are 'prisoners of hope', as **Zechariah 9:12** says: **"Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you."** We are captive to this God who will not give up on the world and on us, and who has a future for us.

Illustration: Michael Cassidy wrote a book, 'Prisoners of Hope', in which he writes about his call to evangelism and mission in the South African context, despite all its difficulties and has made an incredible difference in our sub-continent. We make the difference, because Jesus is with us now, and we have read the final Chapter and he is coming back to get us. We have so much to hope for and to live for. Our lives too have value and can make a difference. We are a part of the hope that this world needs today.

CONCLUSION:

Illustration: Leonardo da Vinci started a work on canvas, carefully choosing colours and outlines, as he developed the picture. Then, for some reason he stops, and asks the student to complete it. The student protests, stating his inadequacy and insufficiency to rise to the challenge. De Vinci says: "Will not what I have done inspire you to do your best?" The fact is Jesus will return and we live with that hope. It is hope that keeps us at the cavass of life, refelcting the picture God has of the world. What picture are you painting? That's the Jesus question to you today: "Will not the good work I have begun in you inspire you to go on?" The Master's touch is on you! The promise of God is for you and, despite the shaky foundations, He will bring it to completion for you.

Romans 8:31 **"What, then, should we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"** Will you take that with you today?