

Morning Ladies

Dear sisters, someone asked me on the way in, 'aren't you a little bit nervous?' I thought well, I'd see how it goes.

I did have a deep appreciation though, once in a while it happens that one of the young women, or one of the women is invited before the consistory. We used to do it in one or two of the previous congregations that I served, that the women were invited before consistory to make public profession of faith. There was particularly one woman, she was a bit older, a really colourful character. She told us later on (I wasn't there when it happened), 'man, I walked into that room and phew there was way too much testosterone in there!' I have just an inkling what she meant!

I understand that in times gone by, a few of the older men used to come, every once and a while. One of the older men was encouraged to do that this morning, and he said, 'Doet niet zo gek!'

This morning I have the wonderful privilege of speaking to you on the topic of 'Living in Hope'. It is really one of the very joyful things that I get to do as a minister of the gospel. One of the greatest things I get to do, is share with people the hope of the gospel. We are those who believe in the Lord. We believe that God has power. And that the Lord God has a good plan. He has a plan for this world and He has a plan for His people. It's a plan of salvation, to bring His people to Himself in glory. It's because the Lord is the living God and because the Lord has the power, we can have a lot of hope in our lives, no matter what the circumstances of life should be.

So what I would like to do with you this morning, I would like to take you just for a brief look at the scriptures, what does the bible actually have to tell us about hope, about the God of hope and about living in hope. It starts back in the OT, it's really interesting, we have this word for hope, we put our hope in something, maybe to try to get a handle on what that actually means. It may be helpful to understand how this word has been translated in the scriptures. It's in the OT there is two words used most prominently for hope. The first word is 'kawai', it means to tarry, to wait, or to hope. The second word is 'yahal', means to wait, to hope for, to endure, or to long for. So hope is not just that you set your heart on something or that you look forward to something, but it also carries with it the connotation that you're willing to wait for it. You live in expectation, you live looking forward to this good thing that you're expecting. That connotation also comes out in the NT word, the most prominent word in the NT that is translated as hope is the word 'alpitzo', it means to hope or to expect. I have written on the sheet, hope is an attitude of expectation and trust that a desire will be fulfilled. Then I say it also has a connotation of waiting patiently, especially in difficult circumstances since you know that God has promised help and deliverance. So if you have hope, then you look forward. You look forward with great expectation, with confidence, you have an expectation that good things will come.

It's really striking that when you read the scriptures, the most prominent object of hope, the most common object of hope is the Lord of Israel. When you read through the scriptures, most of the time we are encouraged to hope in the Lord. So it is not about eternal life in the first place. It's not about being rescued from sin in the first place. It's not about deliverance from your enemies in the first place. But in the first place it is about the Lord Himself. Hope in the Lord, set your hope on the Lord.

We just read together from Isaiah 40. Isaiah 40 is the passage where the Israelites are about to go into exile, it will be a really hard time for them, it will be the most difficult experience of their lives. God had chosen his people the Israelites and had said, 'you are my special people, and through you I am going to bring the Christ into this world'. The Lord had told them, 'you must live in accordance with my ways. The only way that you can fulfil your role as my people, is if you walk in my ways.' He said, 'if you do not walk in my ways, then I will exile you out of the promised land.' The Promised Land was the greatest inheritance of the Israelites. This was the vivid demonstration to the Israelites that they were the people of God. God said, 'you may have my land'. So if they were in the land, it was a sign that they were God's people and that he loved them and it was good between him and them. If they were sent outside of the Promised Land, then that put all sorts of question marks. 'Who are we?' 'Are we still the people of God?' 'Do we still belong to the Lord?' 'Do we still have a special relationship with Him?' So what happens here in Isaiah is just before the Israelites were sent out of the Promised Land. The Lord told them what he was going to do. The prophet starts off with the famous first words of the chapter, 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God'. Then when he gets to verse 12ff, the source of the comfort is in God Himself. You read through the chapter and it exalts the Lord. God calls His people to remember who He is, to remember the power that He has and to bear in mind that these things do not happen outside His control. He is the Lord and they can put their hope in Him. If they put their hope in Him, then it will go well for them.

So at root here, you have this calling that God's people really trust in Him, that they rely upon him, that they put their hope in Him, that they expect their help from Him. So what happens here, is He tells them about His power, about the nations, 'these things don't happen outside of my control'. Verse 15, 'the nations are as a drop in the bucket, they are counted as small dust on the scales'. Nations are nothing, they're not doing anything outside of my power and control. He says, 'I haven't forgotten about you' It's not as if this is outside my plan for you. I am the Lord, I am the one who has the power to bring you back into the Promised Land and take you again as My chosen people.' So what God really does here is he teaches His people to put their hope in Him. It's in that context that He has great promises for them. In the last verses of the chapter He says, 'He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might, he increases strength (vs 29). Even the youths shall be faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who **hope** on the Lord shall renew their strength, they should mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.' You hope in the Lord and you shall renew your strength. The Lord is a God who carries His people. He brings us through to the end of the plans that He has for us. That's the theme in the scriptures around hope. Put your trust in God, expect your help from the Lord because He has the power to accomplish for you what He has promised to do for you.

Then what the Lord does, if you read through the scriptures, this theme of hope is powerfully developed, what the Lord does is he builds up the basis for hope among his people. He starts off in Genesis 3. First he creates the people, makes this beautiful world and puts us in the Garden of Eden. He allows us to live together in joy and gratitude. Genesis 3 we have the fall into sin. Genesis 3-12 it shows us how bad sin is. Genesis 3 we have the curse that comes on sin. Gen 4 He shows it touches families, one brother kills another brother, that brother is sent away because of his sin. In one day, Adam and Eve lose both of their sons. Genesis 5 sin goes through the generations. We have the genealogy, it is a really sad genealogy because it says Seth lives so many years and he died. Enosh lived so many years and he died. Methuselah lived so many years and he died; and he died and he died and he died. It impresses upon us the result of sin. When you sin, you die. The people really

experienced that. There was a little glimmer of hope, Enoch didn't die, he walked with God, the Lord took him away. When you get to Gen 6, you see how far sin caused devastation among God's people, among the whole world. The whole world was given over to sin, God says 'that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time'. So the Lord decided to destroy the world because of the sinfulness of mankind. So Genesis 6-9 we see how the Lord wipes every human being off the face of the earth and Scripture tells us that it doesn't solve the problem of sin. In Gen 8&9 you have the account of Noah coming out of the ark and the very first story is he gets drunk, that his son Canaan sins against him by making fun of his father in his drunken state. Genesis 11 we have the Tower of Babel, people again rise up against the Lord. When you get to the end of Genesis 11 you can wonder 'what hope is there?'. God has wiped off every human being off the face of the earth with the exception of one righteous man. And right away these people go back into sin. They create this Tower of Babel and live in rebellion against the Lord.

The answer is given in Genesis 12. The hope is in the Lord's choice of a man. Through that man, the Lord is going to bring about his promise of the coming Messiah. It is through the coming Messiah that the Lord is going to rescue His people from their sins. So in Genesis 12 we have the promise to Abraham, the great thing about Abraham is he is a man who believed. If you go to Romans 4 it talks about the hope that Abraham had. 'Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed – God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also about to perform. (Romans 4:16-21). Abraham against all hope, in hope believed. The man was 100 years old, his wife was 90 years old, God had promised that he would be the father of many nations, God had promised he would have a son. Now, I don't know how many ladies here are from Fair Haven, but we don't usually expect someone who is in Fair Haven to have a baby. We certainly don't expect those who are the oldest women in Fair Haven to have children. That's the promise of God. God had said that Sarah would have a son, that Abraham would be the father of many nations. And Abraham took God at His word. He had hope that God would fulfil the promises that He had made. It is on the basis of that hope that Abraham became the father of many nations.

That's the start of it.

When you read through the Scriptures, the Lord confirmed that promise. Abraham had Isaac as a son, Isaac had Jacob who had 12 sons. From there you have the nation of Israel. Then the Lord made these promises to the Israelites, you are going to go into exile 400 years from now and I'm going to rescue you out of exile. I'm going to bring you into your own land and you are going to live as my people in the land. God fulfils those promises. He brought them out of Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. He conquered the land for them and gave them what he said he would do. So the people learned to grow in hope. What God said He would do, He would actually bring to pass.

God promised David a son who would also rule on the throne. You read through the two southern tribes and compare and contrast that with the 10 northern tribes, the 2 southern tribes always had a son of David sitting on the throne. The 10 northern tribes had Jeroboam, he had four descendents and then there was a new man who came onto the throne and he had 2 descendents. Then there was a new man who came onto the throne and he had a few descendents. Over and over again there was a new person, a new family that took over the throne of the 10 northern tribes. This again inspired confidence in God's promise that the Lord would always place a descendent on the throne of David.

One of the great challenges that the people faced in the OT is the challenge that they not put their hope in the Lord to provide for them but that they put their hope in the gods of the land. Baal was the god of fertility, the god of thunder. There was a really strong powerful urge for the people to look to the gods of the nations, to put their trust in Baal to provide for them. That's what happened, the people indeed put their faith in Baal, they fell into sin and that's eventually what led to the exile. During the exile, the Lord called His people back. He did not leave them there; He promised them that He was going to rescue them again. After 70 years He brought His people back out of exile. It's really striking when you read through the Scriptures, the promises of God is not based on the people. God does not say 'I will bring you back when you change and when you're different people and when you no longer sin the way you did'. What God promises is, 'I will bring you back because I will renew you, I will give you a new spirit, I will take out the heart of stone and I will give you a heart of flesh. The Lord says, 'I will bring you back, because I'm going to make you into a new people. You are not going to continue to live in sin, but I'm going to show you my grace, I'm going to renew and restore you.' So the hope we have is not dependent upon us, it's not that we change and become better people, that we stop sinning and therefore the Lord does good things for us. In Jeremiah 31 the hope is on the basis of the covenant promises of God. The Lord says, 'I'm going to make a new covenant with you, it's not like the old covenant, but it's a new covenant. There is going to be a mediator of the new covenant and for his sake I'm going to show my grace to you and restore you back to the Promised Land'.

In the NT, the concept of hope finds its fulfilment in the great Messiah, the Mediator, Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection marks the beginning of a new age. Our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, He paid for sin, He died on the cross. But He overcame sin and was raised to a new life. He is now seated on the throne in heaven, He promises, 'I will accomplish all God's promises, I will bring to pass whatever the Lord has promised to you. If you put your hope in Me, then you will receive fulfilment of the promises made to you.'

So these days, there is a strong calling for us to learn to put our hope in the lord and expect our help from Him. You will notice when I talk about hope, there is a really close connection between hope and faith. The author of the Hebrews spells it out for us, Hebrews 11:1 - Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. First you have to hope for something, you hope the Lord will save you from your sins, you hope that the Lord will give you an eternal life together with Him. Faith means that you are sure it is going to happen. You are sure that God will actually rescue you from your sins, He will forgive you. You are sure that God actually will renew you. He will make you into a new person and He will rescue you. You are sure that God will actually raise you to a new life. He is going to give you this new world where you get to live with Him for all time. So faith is the surety of the things we hope for. In a sense hope is also closely connected to

love. The basis of our hope is the love that God has for us. He is our father and we are His children, and He dearly loves us. So we put our hope in the promises He gives us, so we know that He'll fulfil those promises because of His love for us in Jesus Christ.

So what I would love to do with you at this point is talk to you about what hope actually means, what does hope look like in real life? I thought it might be helpful to share a few stories with you and use that as a springboard to show you what the Scripture actually teaches about some of these things.

As family we moved here from Canada about 2.5 almost 3 years ago. One of the new things that happened to us here in Armadale is, it's a bit of a different context that we were familiar with back in Canada. We used to live in a small town of Coaldale, southern Alberta. Alberta is a farming community and Coaldale is a sleepy little town in the southern part of the farming community. Lots of people know lots of people. The people who actually settled the town were Mennonites, so these were really godly people. They set up the hospital, the school, the library. The library has a plaque 'built to the glory of God'. It was a beautiful little community that we were a part of. One of the things about Coaldale is there was a lot of safety there. We never worried about things being safe. It was really a thing in our thinking. If we went to church, sometimes the kids ran out of the house and as we drove out the driveway I would ask if they had locked the door. The answer was 'no, I forgot'. Then I would say, 'ok, we'll trust the Lord to look after things'. Lots of people had that trust; farmers in our community would leave the keys in their machines. People didn't worry about stuff. When we came to Armadale, we visited through the community and everybody has a story, one was broken into, the next had something else, a few months later a car was torched in our community that belonged to a member of our church, at the same time another member's house was broken into. It is all a bit unsettling. A funny story the kids told me is the time when their family got broken into and someone found their key to the safe. So they opened the safe and the only thing they found was 'droppies'. Well it happened that the next year, there was this party down the street from us which went for hours, they called the police, but they didn't turn it down. They called the police again and they still didn't turn it down. So the guy went early in the morning, knocked on the door and asked them to turn it down. He got into a fistfight and the man died. Some months later when we were driving to church one Sunday morning, the police had a forensic unit setting up in front of another house that was a few hundred metres from our house in the other direction. Police sat there for two weeks and we read in the newspaper that someone had died in that house. It is kind of new for our kids to read about drug houses, about houses where residents are untidy and where unsavoury things happen, where houses get bulldozed because the house has been destroyed by its residents. On top of that, the children are occasionally pelted by rocks on the way to school, one of the kids had his bike stolen. We've had a few of these experiences ourselves. It's in these kinds of situations where it can be really tempting to put your hope in whatever. When we first got there, we had this alarm in our house; the temptation is that if I put the alarm on, I'll be safe. Or even better than the alarm people told us, have a dog. When you have a dog, then you're safe. So we indeed have a dog, also have an alarm and we lock our doors. However, these are really useless things to put your hope in. If you set your hope on an alarm, or in your dog, or in the fact you always remember to lock your door, then you have a very small reason to hope. On the contrary, if you set your hope on the living God, that He is a Father that knows you, loves you and cares for you, then you have a big reason to have good hope. The Lord often encourages us in the Scriptures that we not set our hope in other people or other things, but that we set our hope in Him. In the passages such as Psalm 18:1-3, David

says, *'I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praise;; so shall I be saved from my enemies.'* Want to have hope for protection, than set your hope in the Lord. He is the one who provides protection for His people. He is your fortress, He is your rock, He is your deliverer, He is your strength. You can call upon Him and He will be your stronghold.

You don't often hear that encouragement. Not many people who tell you to hope in the Lord. They have lots of other strategies to help you, but it's not always calling you to put your trust in God. One of my favourite texts is Proverbs 18:10, *'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe'*. So I put it to you, there will be times when difficult things happen. In those times, the Lord calls us to really hope in Him.

Back in 2001, with the terrorist attacks in New York, America, there was a lot of suspense, a lot of unease. Many people were uncomfortable with what had happened. It was really striking where we lived in a small community in Northern BC. One of the reasons that many people said they were not worried is the fact that we lived in this sleepy little town that had only 3000 people and it was way out in 'the sticks'. No-one will ever worry about us, so we are safe. Again, it's maybe not the best thing to put your hope in. Put your hope in the Lord, he is your God. He loves you and cares for you, you can trust in Him that He will look after you.

One of the contexts where you can have a lot of hope is the context of the end of our life. Every one of us, at some point in our life, will come to the end. When we come to the end of our life it can be a really difficult time. In the first place, it often includes quite a bit of sickness for many people, they endure some kind of illness and then you come to a stage that you pass away. In the Scriptures the Lord really teaches us to have a lot of hope in His promise of eternal life. One of the men who I met in a previous congregation, I just have to tell you a story about him, it's such an inspiring story, such a reason for hope, a man who lived by hope. He is still alive, 95 by now at a guess. This man lived through the Second World War and ended up in a concentration camp. He had many experiences through the course of his life where he could have lost his life. One of the most dramatic situations was the time when he and his friends experienced the largest bombing raids in history ever. He was at this mine where they mined coal and it was converted to diesel fuel. He was working in that concentration camp. There was no way he could stay outside as there were so many bombs falling. So he ran into one of the bunkers that the Germans had created for exactly that purpose. Only 300 people fit in the bunker. So when the 300 Germans in that area found the bunker, they found too many people in there. They didn't want to shoot them otherwise they would have to drag them out, so they chased them out. So the only location he had to be safe, was to go into the mine itself. He was really nervous about going into the mine because if a bomb landed on the mouth of the mine, he would have been buried alive. Since they had no choice, they fled into the mine and stayed there for about 24 hours. The rest of the bombs fell and by the time the 24 hours was over, he was able to get back out of the mine. He got out and found this bunker, there was an air duct in the top of the bunker, and one of the bombs had landed right in the air duct, so it had flown through and blew up the base of the bunker and killed all 300 Germans who were in there. So He is a man who has lived through the providence of God. He knows that his life is in God's hands and his Lord protects and preserves him. Then fast forward another 50 years, he has survived his first marriage where his wife passed away from cancer, and his second marriage where his wife also passed away. It was a

beautiful time. It was at that stage that he was diagnosed with cancer himself, throat cancer. He was admitted to a hospital in Calgary. One of the things the nurses do with you at that point, is sit down with you and ask you a list of questions, to make sure you know what is happening. The gentleman was 91 or so years old at the time, so they filled in this intake sheet and at the end, the nurse sat back down with him and said, 'Jacob, I need to ask you a question, one of the questions here asks, are you concerned, how concerned are you about the fact you have cancer? You have throat cancer and many people die from it. We would like to know how worried you are and you have circled '0 – not worried at all'. We are wondering why that is? Do you understand the question?' He replied, that yes he did understand the question. He told them he did not have a worry in his heart that he might die. The Lord has been my God and been faithful to me through the course of my life. So He has promised me he is going to take care of me through this and has an eternity of glory for me together with Him. So the man had very little anxiety, had a great deal of hope and trust in the promises of God for the Lord to carry him through this and one day for the Lord to take him home.

That's the gift of our Father. He really inspires that in us. In Psalm 16:9-11, *'Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.'* God has promised David that He will not allow him to seek corruption and will not leave his soul in Sheol. The Lord will restore him, He will raise him to a new life where he will live with God for all time.

On the occasion of a funeral when someone passes away, then I love to read a passage from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, *'But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.'* We do not have to be afraid in the face of death because we are not those who live without hope, but rather we have good hope and the promise of God of an eternal life in store for us.

One of the other areas that the Lord really inspires hope in us is in the context of sin. This is probably one of the areas where we struggle the most. Sometimes we commit certain sins, sometimes sin has a certain power in our lives, and you commit the same sin over and over again. You get caught in this sin and it happens again and again. At some point you can give up hope. You don't know if you will be set free from that. I remember on a certain occasion when I lived in Hamilton, Ontario, one of the ways that I paid my way through school at the seminary was to do some snow clearing. It was 2 o'clock in the morning and I was snow clearing, there was a gentleman who comes home and pulls up into the driveway next to where we were working and says, 'you boys, you go to that seminary there don't you?' We said, 'yes'. Well he said, 'you should really come with me sometime, you going to be like a preacher aren't you?' 'Yes, that's the plan'. 'Well you have to come with me sometime, there is this thing down the road here, we have an AA meeting, you have to come with me because some day you're going to meet someone who is a drunkard and you're going to need to help him. So you have to come with me and I'll show you and you can learn from this.' So Dr John Smith and

myself were invited to go with him later that week. So that Friday evening we went along to the church, literally just across the street from where we lived. We met a bunch of people in the church basement, it was an AA meeting. One of the striking things when you get into the meeting, first they read through the 12 steps, then they talk a bit about where things are at within the group, then people come up and tell some stories about how they have been helped and how they are getting over their addictions, how things are going better for them. Then they try to help and encourage each other, they liaise with each other and just encourage each other. The most striking thing is the way they introduce themselves, 'Hi my name is Bob, I am an alcoholic and I've been dry for 12 years.' 'Hi my name is Shelley, I am an alcoholic and I've been dry for 3 months.' 'Hi my name is Bill, I am an alcoholic and I've been dry for 6 years.' I found it really striking, in the first place they define themselves by their addiction and in the second place, they spell out how long they've been set free from that addiction. I really appreciate the fact that they understand how powerful sin can be, how much power and influence it can have in their lives. What they are saying is that 'this has been a struggle in my life, I've been set free from it and I recognise that I still struggle and am still fighting against it.' On that score and foundation, I really appreciate that they have a realistic reality of the power of sin. They've known it, they've been there, and they've been set free from that.

However, I also struggle with it because if I think about my identity, I've committed a lot of sin in a lot of different ways in my life. But my sin does not define me. What defines me is my relationship with my Saviour. My name is Dirk Poppe and I belong to Jesus Christ. He died on the cross for my sin and He has promised to rescue me from my sins. So for us as the people of God, the greatest comfort that we have is that sin does not have power over us. You are not under law, as Paul says, because you believe in Jesus Christ. Christ will set you free from the power of sin. It's the point that Paul makes in Romans 6. God wants to give us a profound amount of hope, that sin will not be our master because you are not under law, you are under grace. So sin can be a powerful force, it can do a lot of stuff against you, it can lead you into terrible places, but it doesn't define you. Jesus Christ defines you, He is the one who has rescued you from your sins. And He is the one who promises to set you free. So what that means for us, in the struggle against sin, we can rely on the renewing work of the Holy Spirit to help us. God has promised, 'I am your Father, if you ask me for forgiveness, I will forgive your sins'. It's in your baptism that God wants to encourage you and wants you to realise that baptism includes both things, in the first place, your sins are forgiven and secondly you also receive the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God promises you to make you into a new person. I will renew you, you will not continue to live in sin, but you will be a new person who is able to flee from sin, who begins to do what is good and right and pleasing before God. I love the passage in 1 Peter 1:3-5: *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'* We have a living hope, sisters. It is a hope in Jesus Christ, in His resurrection and the eternal inheritance that He has promised to us. Set your eyes on Jesus Christ as your Saviour and He will renew, he will make you into a new person, he will set you free from sin and He will bring you to the eternal glory that God has in store for you.

One of the other contexts in which God encourages us to have hope, is in the context of His care over us and over His creation. Sometimes we struggle, in the first place because of creation. I personally have a real joy in the creation that God has made, just understanding and appreciating

the way God made this world. Enjoying the world that God has given us. It is really sad, because the context in which we live, there is a lot of people today who do not have hope for creation. There are a lot of people who look at our creation and they look at our world and say, 'if things don't change, then this world is going to be destroyed by people'. It is the climate change that is going to happen, the climate is going to change, this world is no longer going to be inhabitable by human beings because we are doing catastrophic things to our world. There are many other people who have a real sadness in their heart because they think this world as we know it, we cannot continue living in the way that we do.

The Lord has a very different perspective with regards to His creation. In Genesis 8:21-22, *'And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer and day and night shall not cease."'* In Revelations the Lord talks about the profound judgements that are going to come down on this world because of the rebellion of mankind. We rebel against the Lord and the Lord is going to punish us and it's also going to have profound ecological consequences. There is going to be grave distress in our world, not just in our own lives but also in our world. We see that and it is part of the judgement of God against sin. Behind that and underneath that God has promised He will preserve His creation. He has promised that He is going to renew His creation. An author I've had a lot of joy reading is Richard Preston. He has done a lot of study about God's world and has written popular literature revealing more of this world that we live in. He has written some stuff about infectious disease. He wrote another book about the trees called 'Wild Trees'. It is about big trees, the second largest tree in the world is the karri tree that we have here in the southwest. The largest tree in the world is the California redwoods. This guy has spent time in the trees, he knows trees. Trees are an incredible part of God's creation. But when you read the book, there is a real sense of darkness and sadness because he witnesses how much creation is suffering due to the sin of mankind. How people are not taking good care of creation and that profoundly affects also the trees. I thought at one stage, I never did it, but I thought that I should write an email to Mr Preston and tell him what God says in Romans 8:18-21, *'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.'* One day God is going to renew His creation. There will be no more corruption. The word for corruption means breaking down, degenerating, where things don't work anymore. We have the promise of a new world, where we have a new creation, where things go well.

Closely tied with that is the promise of God's care for us in this world. One of the recurring themes in the scriptures is that we have a Father who cares for us. We often think of that and call that to mind. In Matthew 7 the Lord calls us to pray for whatever we need. We can pray with good hope because God says that he will indeed provide for you. Look at the sparrows, they don't sleep or spin, yet the Lord provides for them. In the same place, you can ask, you can knock and you can seek, the Lord will hear and He will answer. There are passages in the scriptures where the Lord promises these material blessings. Psalm 37:7-9, *'Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from*

anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret – it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.’ It was a real encouragement for a good friend, who was a contractor in northern BC. He put in an application to build a large building in our town. It was a small town, so it was a big deal if you got it. In the end, the reason he didn’t get it was because his competition slandered him. He was a member of the church, but his competition wasn’t. The only reason he lost the job predominantly, is his name was slandered. It was a really difficult thing to come to terms with. But at the end of the day, it’s really encouraging that the Lord says that he is God, do not fret about the evildoer, the man who uses his wealth and his power in order to accomplish what he wishes to do. The Lord says that he will take care of us. He will look after us. In the end, the Lord says that the meek will inherit the earth. It’s those who walk in humility before the Lord. A meek person is someone who is deeply humbled before God. When you are deeply humbled before God, the Lord will care for you, He will provide for you, He will look after you and give you what you need. You will in the end inherit the earth. It’s the promise of current provision and it’s also the promise of a new world. Blessed are the meek for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, uses this passage of Psalm 37 and He applies it to us who believe in Him and applies it to the new world that is in store for us.

There are a lot of other contexts in which the Lord encourages us to hope. I could talk about hope for restored health. Can we hope for restored health? What do you think? If you are sick, can you hope for restored health? You have hope for health, but it doesn’t necessarily happen. How does that work? Do you actually hope then? Its trust, trust in the Lord. I share that perspective, I also have hope that the Lord can give restored health, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that He will. Sometimes in His wisdom, He decides not to. One of the contexts where that was most prevalent for me and my family, we had a dear friend who was 42 years old, my age, and diagnosed with cancer – T-cell lymphoma. We wrestled with the Lord in prayer for him. One passage we read most commonly was Psalm 41:1-3, *‘Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; you will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; you will sustain him on his sickbed.’* It is an incredible promise. Our dear friend was a man who was very kind to the poor. He was a man who had a very big heart and did a lot of good for many people. So we prayed this prayer often and we asked the Lord that God would indeed preserve him. In the end the Lord had a better plan. The Lord took him home. Within two years he passed away from his cancer and he went home to be with His Father. That was really difficult for us, it was the same attitude that you just expressed here. You hope for restored health. Yes we can hope because we have a good Father who delights to give us good gifts. He is a God who has power and has control and can do these things for us. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that He will do for us. In His wisdom sometimes He has a better plan. In our family, one of the ways we experienced that was on the night our friend passed away. I was at the hospital with him, his wife and family and about half hour or so after he passed away, I called Amanda and told her that. One of the things we had often done, was we had prayed with our children, our children loved him too, so they are praying. It was our son Matthew, he would have been about 2 or 3 years old, and he prays, ‘Lord please be with Mr and please’, then he stops looks up at Amanda and says ‘but He is with Mr’. They had this profound sense in the moment. The Lord had answered their prayer, it was the prayer he had had for many months. The Lord had answered their prayer in a way they had never expected. Please be with Mr Well,

our friend was with the Lord in a far greater way than he had ever been. It was a different answer than what we had expected. It was a really beautiful thing.

Can the Lord do it? Yes He can, He loves to do it for us. Sometimes He has a better plan for us and is going to do it in a different way.

Another context in which the Lord really encourages us to hope is when we are depressed. There are quite a few passages in the scriptures where we have God's people who struggle profoundly because they are very low. A few of the passages stand out. One is in Psalm 42:5, where the psalmist prays, *'Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?'* He is very deep, he is very low. It is in that contexts that he tells himself to put his hope in God. Set your hope in the Lord, He will be your God and He will carry you through it. The Psalm that is even lower is Heman in Psalm 88. It is probably the darkest psalm of the Psalter. When you read through Heman's psalm in the end he ends on a really low note where he says the darkness is his closest friend. If you read through the rest of the psalm, he is abandoned by his friends, by his family members, by his wife. He has one foot in the grave and is as good as dead. He has a lot of darkness in his life, is very sad and suffers profoundly. Yet in the midst of that suffering he still has hope. He still cries out to the Lord his God for help and salvation. It's a paradigm. Sometimes when we are really low in life, life is really dark, sometimes you can give up hope, you have no hope. It's in the dark times that the greatest comfort we have is that we are not on our own. The Lord is our God and He carries us through these things. He will walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. He is near to us, He cares for us and He will carry us along through it. That's one of the greatest comforts that scripture has for us when we are in this very dark place. I will read with you the verses of Psalm 42:1-5, *'As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.'* Put your hope in God because the Lord is the God who can carry you through these things.

It is alongside of all these passages where the Lord encourages us to put our hope in Him, the one thing He also reminds us is not to put our hope in the wrong things. Our natural reaction is to set our hope on things that are transitory, that are passing away. If you put your hope in the wrong things, many times you will be disappointed. It's in the scriptures the Lord really warns us against putting our hope in other people. You all know that, people disappoint. They say things that are inappropriate, they do things that are really hurtful. They don't have the power at the end of the day, to change our lives. In Psalm 118:8-9, *'It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.'* Again in Psalm 146:3-5, *'Do not put your trust in prices, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.'* When you put your hope in the Lord your God, then you are happy. If you keep reading through Psalm 146 it talks about all the blessings that God gives to people in all sorts of different situations. It talks about the widow and the orphan, about people who suffer due to oppression and

injustice. It talks about many different contexts where God's people need His help. The message is; if you put your hope in the Lord, He will carry you through.

Another place where we tend to put our hope, where we're really foolish, is in wealth. The Psalm that develops this theme most clearly is in Psalm 49. When reading Psalm 49, the psalmist really says to us whatever you do don't put your hope in wealth, it's worthless on the day of disaster. If you have a lot of money it doesn't save you, it doesn't redeem your life. It doesn't help you. It's a message that comes out in a variety of different passages. I always love Proverbs 23:5, *'Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.'* (NIV) I tell that to my kids occasionally. You have to glance at riches because they fly away. We are not used to that. It doesn't often happen to us. If you are a student of history, you understand that money does not last forever. Money comes and money goes. There is a multitude of ways in which people lose their money. If you set your hope on money, you are going to be sorely disappointed. In 1 Timothy 6:17, *'Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.'* Don't put your trust in uncertain riches, because you will be disappointed.

For us, the Lord really warns us not to put our trust in horses, in the military, no king is saved by the multitude of an army, a mighty man is not delivered by great strength, a horse is a vain hope for safety, neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. If you put your hope in these wrong things, than you set yourself up for disaster. If you put your hope in people, then people will disappoint you. What ends up happening is that instead of having hope for the future, that you become cynical for the future.

It used to be that Australian culture, American culture, Canadian culture, western culture was a very optimistic kind of culture. We live in a society that has a can-do attitude. You can do whatever you want to do. At one time, that was based on hope in God. It was based on a Protestant world view, on a biblical world view. The Lord is our God, we set our hope in the Lord. With Him as our God we can conquer anything, we can do anything. That entrepreneurial, that independent spirit is the spirit of the western world that was based on this faith on God. What has happened in the last 50 to 100 years is we lost our faith in God. As a society we no longer have faith in God.

So what do you have faith in, what do you hope for? We have a man like Roosevelt who rallied the nation to have faith in faith. Or you have Julie Andrews in the Sound of Music, have confidence in confidence itself. Or you have Disney that says you will find prince charming and you will live happily ever after and everything is going to go well for you. Then our kids go to school and they find out, often in a really personal way, that people are evil. They commit sin, bad stuff happens. They don't have this optimism much anymore. They lose a sense of hope. If you live in that hope, where you put your hope in man or other people, you expect people to solve things and make things different to make sure things go well; in the end you are sorely disappointed. Instead of having this optimism, you end up being really cynical. One of the guys I can't read anymore. In my youth I used to enjoy books by John Grisham, a really engaging author. Do you women read from him, or is that just a man thing? The really sad thing is he is extremely cynical. Half the time it is the bad guys who win. Most stories have a happy ending, but with Mr Grisham, especially his later books, his stories don't have a happy ending. The bad guys manipulate their way to win at the end of the day. The poor souls, who wished for something different, don't get justice, the law is not properly applied and things are too

bad for them. It is a really hopeless perspective. The man has no hope and a deep sense of cynicism. If you open up your newspapers, you read a lot of this cynicism. People don't have hope and don't expect things to be better in the future.

It is in this kind of context that the Lord really calls us as His people to remain hopeful in Him, to put our help and expectation in Him and to rely upon Him. I love the perspective of the Joshua and Caleb stories of the 12 spies. They go into the Promised Land and ten of the men come back cynical. 'We can't do it, they are too powerful. If we try it, we will lose. They are like mighty men and we are little grasshoppers, so let's not even try.' Joshua and Caleb don't agree, 'the Lord will give us victory, the Lord is our God, the Lord has promised us. So let's go and let's do it because the Lord is with us.' It is a beautiful picture and contrast of a life of cynicism and a life of faith. If we put our hope in the Lord, then we can have good hope for the future.

So this morning, I really encourage you to grow in hope before the Lord. Learn to live in prayer. Learn to know the promises of God. What has God promised you? What has He said to you? It is as you know the promises of God that you can pray the promises of God. It is as you pray God's promises that you can wrestle in prayer the things before Him that you need. You say 'God you have promised to forgive my sins for Jesus' sake, so I trust you are going to do that. You have promised to renew me, so I trust that this sin is not going to have power over me in the same way for the rest of my life. God you have promised an eternal life for me, so I trust that even though I have this illness, even though it looks like I'm coming to the end of this life, that there is a future for me, that I have good hope that I get to live with you.' So read the scriptures with a view to remembering the promises of God, to learning the promises of God. Then pray these things, engage with God in prayer around these promises. Ask God to do for you what He said he will do for you.

Then you should be aware that it is often through suffering that the Lord builds our hope in Him. It is when we suffer that we learn to grow in hope. Then we learn we cannot do it ourselves. We learn that our spouse cannot do it for us. We learn that other people can't help us, can't save us and can't make it different for us. Then we cast ourselves upon the Lord, because the Lord is the only one who can make it different. So when you suffer it is often not an expression of the Lord leaving you or abandoning you. It is one of the ways in which the Lord seeks to build up hope in you. He seeks to draw you close to Him. He even says that in Romans 5:3-5, *'And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.'* The words of Romans 15:4, *'For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.'* God wants you to have hope and he gives it to you. It is Romans 15:13, *'Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'* The Lord is a God of hope. He promises here that He will give you this hope so that you may be filled with joy and peace and that you may abound with His hope through the work of His Holy Spirit.

I would like to leave you with the words of 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, *'Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.'* He has loved us,

He has given us everlasting consolation and good hope. He has done that for us as an act of grace. Let's look to Him then and rely upon Him to work that hope in our hearts.