

A Hope That Produces Endurance

by David Roper

David Roper's sermon emphasizes the power of hope in Christ to produce endurance amidst life's challenges.

Duration: 38:06

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of our response to the revelation that God will come in judgment to set things right. He encourages believers to have hope in eternal life, the resurrection of their bodies, and the second coming of Christ. The preacher assures that God has not abandoned us and is actively working towards His glory and victory. Despite the prevalence of evil in the world, the preacher reminds believers to remain calm because God will ultimately establish His righteous rule. He urges believers to be armed for the spiritual conflict by relying on faith, love, and the hope of salvation. The sermon concludes with the assurance that God is in control and is moving towards a point of triumph.

Transcript

I'd like to have you turn to this book again. We've been looking at three forces that are operative in the life and the characteristic effects that each produces. We saw first Paul's word about faith as an attitude of dependence upon a mighty indwelling Lord, a faith that works as he speaks of it in chapter 1 verse 3 of 1 Thessalonians, works in terms of activities that really count in God's estimate.

And then last Sunday we took a look at love, God's love as it's shared with us and as we can know something of this mighty resource in our own life, love to love unlovely people, people who as an object do not naturally elicit love from us, a love that labors on behalf of other people, a love that sets aside self and seeks the very best for others, that builds into their life. Now this week we want to look at the third force which Paul calls in verse 3, the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ or the hope that produces endurance, produces patience. I think we should begin with a brief word of definition because the word hope has come to have a little bit different meaning today than it did as it was originally used in the New Testament.

Today it indicates a bit of contingency, a hopeful expectancy that something will happen but there's some question as to whether or not it will really occur. We say I hope it doesn't rain or we say I hope that I make it through this quarter in school, a little bit of uneasiness or uncertainty about the future but this is not the New Testament usage because in the New Testament it indicates an absolute certainty about the future,

an attitude of eager anticipation, of brilliant expectancy, of confidence in God and his ability to do what he's promised. It's an attitude that says bring on the world, I'm ready, I have the resources in Jesus Christ to meet the world head on.

Now behind this concept is the realization that God is in business. He isn't dead, he hasn't abandoned us. We're not left in our predicament like rats trying to find their way around in a maze.

We do not live in a mechanistic universe that God has abandoned. God has a plan in progress which will eventuate in his glory and honor and victory and in spite of the prevalence of evil in the world today, God is winning on all fronts. There's a little limerick that goes the world had a hopeful beginning but we spoiled our chances by sinning.

We hope that the story will end to God's glory but at present the other side's winning. Now when you look around in the world today it does seem that the other side is winning. We see a vast amount of evil loose in the world, problems in Vietnam and the chaotic situation in China, violence and upheaval every place and we don't even have to look that far.

We can see it in our own community and in our own personal lives. The prevailing attitude today is one of fear and futility of personal disintegration and chaos. The feeling that God is just not running the world right today.

But for the believing Christian, the Christian who really understands the principles by which God operates, we have no need to be caught up in this attitude because we have the knowledge of God's purposeful activity in the world and in our own life this liberates us from feelings of futility and despair because those of us who are identified with God through Jesus Christ have the prospect of sharing in his victory. So hope is the attitude then that God is in control. He has not abdicated his throne, he has the world in his hands.

Everything's under control. Now this gives hope, this gives confidence, the assurance that everything is moving toward the goal that God has intended. Now Paul says that this hope results in steadfastness or endurance.

The word that Paul chooses that's translated steadfastness means literally to remain under, to stand under pressure. I suppose the modern equivalent would be to hang in there despite the pressures that may come. We don't have to give way to gloom and to despair because this hope gives stability to life despite the blight and the decay of our society.

Despite the evil day, we know that we can stand, that we can endure because we have this hope. We can have a positive expectant attitude that God is in control. Now I think that this is a desperate need among Christians today.

I know that there's a real need in my own life to constantly remind myself that God is on the throne, that he's alive and operative and everything is moving purposefully because I see in my own life and in others a common reaction to the pressures today. One perhaps is a spirit of complete intimidation. The world is on its way to ruin and we wring our hands and bite our nails and tear our hair and cower in fear which does a very effective job of just neutralizing any influence that we can have on the world.

Or we write off the world as a dead loss and retreat. Usually we withdraw into Christian circles and find our fellowship there and just refuse to venture out into the world and face it head-on. As one man has said, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that Satan has two ways of taking us out of the play.

One is to drive us to become a drunk or to become a monk. We either are driven to excess or we're driven to a hole in the wall. We hide and essentially we're wiped out as far as any impact on the world is concerned.

Or, as Bill Gwynne was telling our college students last week, we become a part of the problem instead of a part of the solution. We see that the world is moving in this direction and the only logical course of action is to move along with it. Adopting the Christian counterpart of the Epicurean philosophy, let us eat, drink, and be merry because tomorrow we can appropriate 1 John 1.9 and confess our sins.

Now, I see these reactions. I see the temptation of these reactions on my own part, and I see the need for a corrective. And the corrective is always the truth.

Our knowledge of every situation is superficial at best. But as we look at the Word, we see that there is an omnipotent God at work, that quietly and inexorably He is moving toward a point of triumph, that He's winning on every front. We have a little Saturday night ritual in our home when we're all there.

We like to watch Flipper. And about three or four weeks ago, we were gathered around the television set watching a particularly exciting episode, and Flipper had encountered a big manta ray. And my boys were just glued to the set in terror, and Ranger Ricks made some comment about the fact that this manta ray must weigh a ton.

And Brian, my four-year-old, turned around to Carolyn and me, and he said, uh, that's not very big, is it? And I said, yes, son, that's a pretty good-sized fish. And he thought a minute, and then he brightened up, and he said, uh, God's bigger than that. And I was tempted there to launch into a theological discourse about the fact that God as a Spirit, you know, can't be measured quantitatively.

But fortunately, the Lord shut my mouth, because the longer I thought about it, the more sense that made that God is bigger than anything that's happening, that He's big enough to encompass every event in our life and to incorporate that as a part of His plan. I sit down to read the papers, and I see our dear college kids and the way things are moving in the lives of these kids, and I'm tempted to despair. But I think, no, God's bigger than that.

Or I see things come into my own personal life and the disintegration and other things that I see around me, and I think, no, no, God's bigger than that. That everything is a part of His overall operation, and He's moving toward the establishment of His righteous rule in the world. He's firmly planted on the throne, and this plants our feet firmly.

We have the confidence that He's in control. Now, that's the hope that endures. I think this is a great concept, and I'd like to have us look at 1 Thessalonians 4 and look deeper at this, because I want us to see what our specific hope is.

We're often charged with, and rightly so, by non-Christians about being vague, and I'd like to just pin this down. What is our hope? The hope that gives endurance. I'd like to read this section, starting with verse 13 through the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4, Paul says, But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive who are left until the coming of the Lord shall not

precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangels' call and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive who are left shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The first hope that I see in this passage is the hope of eternal life. Paul writes to Titus and refers to the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised ages ago. This is the answer to the great dilemma that faces every man.

If a man dies, will he live again? Now this is a question that many people are asking themselves because death just doesn't seem to fit into our program. It seems to be an alien. It doesn't belong.

It's not a natural part of things as we know them. I picked up a quotation some weeks ago. A psychiatrist wrote these words, Man cannot understand his death.

To him the thought is intolerable that this whole world of life and friendship, this world of work and devotion should be simply wiped out to fall by the wayside while others go on chattering as if nothing happened. May God pardon me, but I cannot understand death existing in his world. But this passage solves that dilemma.

Paul says without question, even without understanding the process, it's clear that death is nothing to be feared. In some way man has been set free from the tyranny of death. And that this event is nothing more than a springboard into a much richer relationship, a much closer fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Now that's our hope, eternal life. Let me just read a couple of passages here. You don't need to follow along, but just listen.

In Philippians, the first chapter, the 20th verse, Paul says, As it is my eager expectation and hope that I should not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Or in 2 Corinthians, the 5th chapter, Paul writes, So we are always of good courage.

We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Now that's our prospect, that's our hope of moving from this life right into a face-to-face personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the one who said, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Now that's quite a confidence. Nothing to fear in this life. Because knowing that death just means moving into a personal relationship, a face-to-face, one-on-one relationship with Jesus Christ.

I see a second hope in this passage. It's just alluded to here. We would have to go to 1 Corinthians 15 to see this concept in more detail.

But it's the fact of the resurrection of our body. Now let me lay a little bit of foundation, if you will. The scriptures say that basically man has two parts.

He has a body, the part that we see, and he has an inner life, the immaterial life. And it seems as though the scriptures divide this immaterial life into two parts. The soul, which is our personality, the behaving part of man, and the spirit, which is the animating force in man.

The spirit comes from God. It's the means by which life is imparted and sustained. Now, it's obvious that God has a plan for the spirit and the soul.

And we saw in these passages that I read earlier that physical death means instantaneously for the spirit and the soul to be in God's presence. But what about the body? The scriptures say that God has a purpose for the total man, not just the immaterial part of man, but the total man. And his purpose is to give us another body, a new body.

The body now is the vehicle for expressing our personality and spiritual life. It's the means by which the immaterial man is manifest. In the terms of the words here that are ascribed behind me, Paul says, You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

Or, Paul says in Romans 12, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body a living sacrifice. What God wants is a body available to him through which he can display his character, his life. But the problem now is that the body is weak and frail.

At best, it's a second-rate instrument. It gets tired. It breaks down.

It balks. It's resistant to our inner desires to serve God in the fullness of our strength. In Christ's words, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Now, God's plan is to raise this body, the body that Paul calls the body of humiliation, and create a new body that's equal to the demands of the spirit with an infinite capacity to serve. Love wants to serve, and it's frustrated when it can't serve. We've all had the experience of wanting desperately to do something but just not being able to do it because of some physical infirmity.

But Paul says our hope is that we're going to have a body just like Jesus Christ's. His resurrection is the hope and the testimony and the witness to the kind of life that we'll have. And Paul says in writing to the Philippians that he will change this body of humiliation and make it like his glorious body.

Paul uses a very apt simile for this principle. He says that the body sleeps, refers to those who sleep through Jesus. Now, he's not talking about the sleeping saints at the back of the auditorium, but he's talking about the body.

And he's not talking about the spirit because we know on the basis of other scripture that the spirit goes immediately into God's presence. But the body sleeps. The Greek word that's translated sleep literally means lie down.

Can't be talking about a soul. It's talking about the position of the body. When we die, the body slides down.

In fact, our word cemetery comes from this Greek word, karmaterion, a place where the body rests. And the word for resurrection literally means to stand up. And this is what God is going to do.

This is our hope that we're going to have the same kind of resurrection body that Jesus Christ had. He's going to change this limited body that we have and make it just like his. He's going to stand up.

And this must have been exciting to these men, many of whom I'm sure had either talked to people who had seen the risen Jesus or perhaps had seen him themselves. Here was a body that had been laid in the tomb. It was broken, battered beyond recognition.

His heart had been pierced by a Roman spear, and yet he broke out of the tomb with power. He didn't have to limp to the place where the disciples were gathered on pierced feet. He wasn't weak from loss of blood.

He wasn't bent over in pain. He stood before them in power and in authority with a body that was equal to the demands of his spirit. And they thought to be like him, to have that kind of life.

That's our hope. Strength, infinite health and reserve. There's a third hope in this passage going back to 1 Thessalonians 4, and that is that Jesus Christ is coming back again.

You have the repeated statement through this paragraph. He's coming again. I find it hard to believe that.

I have to remind myself constantly that he's coming back. He could come back today. In the opening chapters of the book of Acts, starting in verse 8, the Lord is speaking, and he says, But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria into the end of the earth.

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. I'd love to have been there when that event took place.

I'm sure the disciples were never surprised at what the Lord was going to do next. But one moment he was standing there talking to them, and the next minute he was gone. And they must have been standing there in bewilderment, looking up into the sky because of the statement that the angels make.

Men, why are you standing around looking up into the sky? He's coming back. And this was the eager expectation of these men from that point on. They thought that he could come any time, perhaps during their lifetime.

It was the hope that spurred them on that any moment he could be back, to take them to himself, to set things right in the world. Now, according to this passage, again in 1 Thessalonians, there are two aspects of his coming. One is his coming to claim his own.

The second has to do with the restoration of order in a sin-cursed world. There's a little bit of a problem here, a problem in the timing of these two events. Many believe that these events are simultaneous, that he'll come and take those who belong to him and judge the world at that moment.

Others feel that there will be a period of time of some seven years between these two events. And this is one of those areas where the Holy Spirit has been a little bit ambiguous, so it's hard to pin down. And fortunately, we don't have to solve that problem this morning.

It's enough to see that there are two things that are accomplished when he comes. The first is that he's coming to take his own, those who belong to him. This is seen from the standpoint of two groups.

Some believers will be alive and others will have died. The dead in Christ, Paul says, Christ will raise first. Then we which are alive, those of us who remain behind, who are alive when he comes, will be snatched up, taken up to meet him in the air.

One great reunion with all the saints who love Jesus Christ. Now, Paul uses a very graphic expression when he refers to this snatching away or the rapture, as some refer to it. Literally, it means to come and tear something away by force.

Now, I'm sure you feel as I do that you're not going to resist this event. We're not that attached to this world that we're going to be so firmly rooted that God's going to have to tear us away. I don't think that's his point.

Evidently, there's some power that's at work to impede God's program, resisting his taking us away. There's a suggestion here, perhaps, that Satan, who is the prince of the power of the air, and Paul refers to the air here as the sphere through which we will be taken, that Satan, perhaps, will make one last-ditch stand to stop God's program, but that Jesus himself will snatch us finally and ultimately out of Satan's hand and take us to be with him. Now, what is that like? Well, frankly, I don't know.

All Paul says is that we'll be with the Lord. And I know enough, as you do, of life with Jesus Christ right now to know that it'll be indescribable. That's why Paul doesn't try to delineate in detail what this will be.

We'll be with the Lord. Now, that's the first aspect of his coming. The second aspect is his coming in judgment.

And in chapter 5, verse 1, Paul says, But as to the times and the season, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you, for you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. Sudden destruction for those who have resisted Jesus Christ.

The word here is not annihilation, but ruination. The taking away of everything that gives worth to life. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul says that essentially what happens is that they're excluded from the power of God and the presence of God.

Now, that's a very grim prospect. And there's not one of us that can rejoice in that picture. It's incredible that God would set people away like that.

But I think that what he's after is that God loves us so much that he'll let us have our own way. And if we insist on shutting ourself away from his power and his presence, he lets us have that choice, and then he lets us alone. He will not violate our will.

If we insist on living in rebellion, he'll let us go. Christ referred to hell as Gehenna. Gehenna is a geographical location outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

It was the garbage dump of the city of Jerusalem. And essentially what Paul is saying is that we just go out to live worthless lives. We're tossed on the trash heap, nothing worthwhile.

Now, this is not a hope. In what sense is this a bright prospect for the believer? Because there is no one of us who can face that prospect knowing that there will be some who will be excluded from God's power and

presence who can rejoice in that. But I think the point that Paul is making is that God is going to ensure that the world will run right.

He's going to set his program in operation and make certain that the world is going to be the kind of place that he intended it to be. No more sin, no rebellion, nothing that can retire his program. The world is like a machine, a smoothly functioning machine that got out of alignment and has begun to shake itself to pieces.

And the mechanic has to come and set it back in alignment so that it operates smoothly. The analogy is poor because the world is not a machine, it's people. And God is not a mechanic, he's a father.

And he loves people, but he will not coerce them. And it may be necessary for him to move in, and he will move in in judgment to set things right. Now, what is our response to this great revelation? Our hope of eternal life, the hope of a resurrected body, the hope of his second coming to bring us to himself and deal in judgment with a sin-cursed world.

In verse 5 and following, he writes, or perhaps starting in verse 4, But you're not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief, for you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first response is to stay awake, be alert, be ready, because he could come at any time. He could come today. It's a strong incentive to righteous conduct, and the scriptures so use it because he could come back at any moment.

There's always the temptation to put off doing what we know is right until some future time. But Paul says, straighten it up now. Stay awake, alert, be ready, because we're all going to face Jesus Christ.

Secondly, he says, stay sober. Be clear-headed. Don't panic.

Don't throw in the towel. Don't withdraw from the world. Be calm, because he's coming back.

He's going to set the world right. He's going to establish his righteous rule. And third, he says, be armed for the conflict.

Buckle on the breastplate of faith, resting upon the mighty power of God, or in terms of a book title I saw recently, In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash. Resting upon him, the breastplate of love, the spirit of concern. We draw from God for this, to love people, despite the cost or consequence to us.

And third, the helmet of salvation, which is the hope of our ultimate salvation. The knowledge that God is working out a process that will consummate in his glory, both in the world and in our lives. Now, that's the hope that endures.

That's what stabilizes us in the world today, that God's in control. I had a classic illustration of this this week. Randy, our six-year-old, was learning how to ride a bike.

And Carolyn and I stand kind of in the wings, behind the window, and watch him make these kamikaze runs up and down Morgan. Scares us half to death, but we know that he's just got to learn. And I told Randy, Thursday, when he got this bike, you can learn to ride that thing.

The neighbor, who's only five, can ride it. And he's five, and you're six, and you can ride that thing. So, he got a few lessons and then launched out.

And he has had some of the biggest spills you've ever seen in your life. Yesterday, he ran right slap into the back of our neighbor's car, full tilt. But he got up, and I ran out there.

I thought, sure, he was bleeding from an artery or something, and I picked him up and dusted him off. And I said, good night, are you hurt? He said, nope. I said, I'm going to ride that bike.

Because you told me I could ride it, and I'm going to ride it. And he's taking his bath yesterday, and I went in there, and he has bruises all over him, he's battered. He's really taking his lumps, but he's going to ride that bike.

Now, that's a hope that's steadfast and endures. He'll take his lumps, but he'll learn, and he's going to make it. Now, we have a hope, and we're going to take a lot of lumps, but we know that this hope is secure, it's firm.

Shall we pray?

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