

Daily Devotional: April 20, 2020 Where Does Your Hope Come From?

There are so many reasons to feel discouraged today: When we hear the latest news on the Covid-19 virus in our state, our country and throughout the world; when we face isolation challenges that seem overwhelming; when we have other problems that don't seem to have solutions considering the state of our recent economy, the threat of job loss and pension security; and the shut-down of so many businesses. These are certainly times when we can feel hopeless.

The Apostle Paul knew that all of us need hope. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:7,13 that hope always perseveres and remains, that is, endures. No matter how dark or depressing our circumstances may appear, we always can hope in God! God wants to give us hope in any situation, no matter how dark things might seem.

But we should not merely hope. God wants us to *rejoice* in hope! (Romans 12:12)

Hope is a message that we see all through the Bible, and yet it is not a word we often hear used with any real meaning in day-to-day conversation. It may be that those who do not believe in Jesus have no understanding of where true hope comes from or where to place their hope. They may not believe that placing hope in a higher power can make difficult circumstances turn out well.

Where does our Christian hope come from? Paul gives the answer in his letter to the Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Our hope comes directly from the love and grace of God and Jesus Christ. Together with this hope we can also feel Jesus' eternal encouragement. Our hope in Christ allows us to look objectively at our present circumstances and to perceive a blessed and positive future.

It would seem that hope ought to be a natural human feeling. Though it may often be extinguished in trying situations, hope lies within the subconscious of most humans. But if true hope comes from Jesus, how do we obtain that source of hope? When and how can we know hope that truly comes from Christ?

"And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Romans 5:2-5 (NIV)

According to this passage, the starting point for our hope is in troubles, in suffering. Of course, we should not purposely enter into suffering expecting to ultimately obtain hope. As human beings we know we will confront many trials and tribulations, sufferings and also successes. To rejoice in our sufferings means we continue to praise God in spite of what we are going through. It is this boldness that will eventually lead to hope. Such hope comes from being in relationship with God, knowing God's love and faithfulness despite the complexities that we experience in life. Hope that is acquired in this manner is an amazing thing. It never disappoints us.

When we have placed our faith in Christ, we have every reason in the world to have hope. For this hope is eternal and will not frustrate or betray us. Can we as Christians, trusting in the great eternal promise made to us through the sacrifice of our Lord, afford to take our hope from anywhere else or place our hope in anyone else? "We boast in the hope of the glory of God!"

Prayer: God of Hope, allow us today to find a moment of light in whatever darkness has overcome us. Help us not to fear, but to trust that you are walking with us even when the light is not visible to us. Although we may not feel your presence and the abounding love that encircles us, we take the leap of faith, trusting that your love far outweighs any conflict, fear, disappointment, anguish, or loss we are feeling. May we be a glimmer of hope, a ray of light for those experiencing pain around us. Reveal to us how we might move forward and be models of hope for those who also need to experience it. In Christ's name, Amen.