Scripture: Psalm 33:20–22

Introduction: Hopelessness

**Stats:** Sociologists who study the phenomenon of suicide zoom in on suicide notes. They look at the notes left behind by ancient Greco-Romans from Jesus’ time all the way up to modern suicide notes. And they have found one undeniable common thread: *hopelessness caused by feeling trapped in an impossible, unchanging, unending nightmare.* **The circumstances behind it are wide and varied.** There is no one situation that triggers it. But there does seem to be one constant—a *state of mind that says—this situation is never going to change and it is unbearable.*

**Hopelessness can manifest itself in a variety of forms:**

**Causes of hopelessness.** Feeling…

* **Abandonment or feeling forsaken:** Those who struggle with depression often feeling discarded by the group; left behind or left out; detached from community and isolated. Isolation can bring intense feelings of unworthiness, and that sense of worthlessness can lead to alienation from the world. When we get isolated we tend to make up stories—about ourselves and about what other people are thinking about us.
* **Failure:** people who actually try and experience the shame of failing.
* **Powerlessness:** In every situation that I can’t change—it reveals a false belief I hold—that I am in control.
* **A sense of ultimate doom: Sociologists and psychologists** study people who hold a “this world only” worldview—and the term for it is survival-doom worldview. Don’t believe for one second that a person who is an intellectually satisfied atheist has any sense of hope whatsoever. If you hold a worldview that says that you are creature that exists purely as a result of natural and undirected forces—that you are not really a soul, a self—and there is no prospect for life beyond the grave—then the instances of hopelessness among those who hold a mere survivalist worldview are very high. Paul said, “If we have hope only for this life then we are to be pitied.”

**The American Journal of Psychiatry reported the following: “Religiously unaffiliated subjects had significantly more** lifetime suicide attempts and more first-degree relatives who committed suicide than subjects who endorsed a religious affiliation. Unaffiliated subjects were younger, less often married, less often had children, and had less contact with family members. Furthermore, subjects with no religious affiliation perceived **fewer reasons for living**, particularly **fewer moral objections to suicide**. In terms of clinical characteristics, religiously unaffiliated subjects had more lifetime impulsivity, aggression, and past substance use disorder.” The World Health Organization had similar findings—those countries that are considered irreligious (high incidents of atheism) had the highest rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide.

What is hope? Rom 8:24 “Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees?” The nature of hope is that it is an expectation of something that hasn’t been fully delivered yet.

I don’t hope that I will get married, I am already married, and I see evidence of that every single day.

I don’t anticipate becoming a pastor someday, I already am.

**I do hope for a revival and redemption of our community here. Praying daily that the Spirit will be poured out in a great awakening in Idaho Falls and that the people in this town who’ve walked in darkness will be saved—gloriously transformed by the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus. This is what Paul refers to as “one hope” in Eph 41. A life without God is a life without hope?**

**Ephesians 2:12** “At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

I’m not saying that a person who is without God is utterly immoral—though apart from Christ all of us have sinned.

I’m not saying that a person who is without God is utterly aimless—people can have a finite sense of purpose.

I’m not saying that a person who is without God can’t have a fairly good marriage or experience moments or seasons of joy and fulfillment. You don’t need to believe in God to experience the blessings and prevenient grace of God.

**The unbeliever is not utterly without these things, they are ultimately without them.** Because no matter how much fun, or pleasure, or productivity you manage to wring out of this finite life—ultimately there is the matter of our eternal status.

**Ephesians 2:1-3.** And although you were **dead in your transgressions and sins,** 2in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience, 3among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath…”

* death through disobedience. Notice first he says that: “The day you disobey my command, you will die.”

**we have followed the path of this world** 2:2a “you formerly lived according to this world’s present pathaccording to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience…” This path is very simply the way of life in the world. We are raised living according to the pattern that is put before us. At an early age, we tend to emulate the patterns we see in others. Raised in an environment of disobedience to God’s Word.

* death through evil desires Then Paul says we have followed through on our innate evil desires.We have followed the prince of the power of the air: They are spiritual forces in heavenly realms leading humanity astray.

**we have followed the passions of the sinful nature** 2:2b-3a “among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind.” The picture he paints here is bleak. The problem is not that we are merely dysfunctional in relationships, or have psychological issues, or are suffering from a disorder. All of that might be true. The core dilemma of the human soul is that we are sinners, born into sin, following the path of the world in disobedience to God’s will, rushing after evil desires enabled by the prince of the power of the air and by our own passions—all corrupted through sin.

* death resulting in our demise (2:3b) “and we were by nature children of wrath…”

**Spiritual death is a severing of relationship.** Luke 15 the story of the Prodigal illustrates this. And all those Mideastern Jews get the analogy. Jesus is teaching there that the son is relationally dead. He has given his father the ultimate dishonor. Perpetrated a fraud, squandered his share of he inheritance—demanded an inheritance that was never due him as the second born, and then thrown this treasure away on raucous living and sin. After he repents, the elder son protests and the Father says, “Your brother was dead is now alive.”

**Spiritual death is disabling of our spiritual faculties.** We have been incapacitated—our capacity to commune with God is diminished.

Apart from God in Christ, we were hopelessly lost in the world. Adrift. Abandoned to the devastation and consequences of our sin.

**2. Jesus redeems our past, giving us new life.**

**2:4-7** But God, being rich in mercy, **because of his great love with which he loved us,** 5even though we **were dead in transgressions**, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved!— 6and he raised us up with him and **seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,** **7to demonstrate in the coming ages** the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The two most important words in the Bible “But God…” saw the problem, and chose to do something about it.

**Illus. My dad in the casket. My dad used to worry about his balding head.** He would talk about it sometimes, lamenting losing his hair in his twenties and thirties. My dad had **a fierce cough**, like a shaking the walls kind of cough—he was a heavy smoker and the years of chain smoking took their toll on him physically. Sometimes, he would lament that he ever started, and he would tell me “don’t you ever start smoking.” My dad was a welder by trade—laboring long hours and had the **scars on his hands, had lost sight in one of his eyes**—had a shop accident where he lost most of his thumb. And sometimes, he’d complain about that.

But on the day of his funeral, I walked up to his casket and saw him as I rarely if ever did. In a very fine suit, makeup on his face to hide the lines from a hard life etched across his forehead. No shop grease on his hands. He looked better than I had ever seen him.

* **The only thing you can do with a corpse is dress it up.** We can dress up a corpse in its Sunday best. Put some makeup on the face, clean the hands and the finger nails. Make the corpse presentable for viewing. But nothing we do to that body is going to solve the problem. The only solution a dead man needs is life.
* **Whatever problems the dead man had before he died**—***he only has one problem now.*** He’s dead.

**So we discern two purposes of God in giving life to our dead souls.**

The first one he mentions is God’s rich, extravagant mercy—and his great love toward us. What cause for rejoicing to know that based on nothing more than his desire, his mercy, his love for us—that he took the initiative to save us, to raise us back to life, to restore us from estrangement.

**The second reason he brings our attention to is his desire to display us as trophies of his unequaled grace**, to demonstrate to all creation the extravagance of his kindness toward those of us who believe and are found in Christ. The biblical word for “trophy” is the word “crown.” If you competed in the games and won you received a crown. A trophy is a symbol of your achievement—your work. Your victory. The Christian believer is not a symbol of his own achievement, his own victory over sin—we are trophies of his grace and mercy—his love and effort.

**3. God’s gracious salvation calls for a response of trusting acceptance.**

**So Paul has told us of our spiritual possessions in Christ.** Blessed beyond measure with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

**Paul now has told us of our spiritual position in Christ.** Reconciled to God, returned from exile, and raised from the dead.

**So he ends by articulating the means of so great an inheritance and salvation.**

**Eph 2:8-10 “**For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9it is not from works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.”

Analogy: Little children are born into the world with no resume of achievement. They grow up and they do a lot of things. As babies and toddlers they’re hilarious. The funny little things they say and do can keep us in stitches—even sometimes when they’re being stinkers, or mischievous. They’re learning the affectation of adulthood. As they grow they get involved in sports, or academics or whatever. Maybe they become competitive, or like to read—as they become adults they fly the coop and get an education, or trade skills and work and hopefully lead meaningful God-honoring lives.

We gave birth to them and life to them so that they could do and accomplish and enjoy the fruit of their labor—but life comes before achievement. Birth precedes accomplishment. This is what the grace of God is. We are saved and born again by the will of God, through the initiative of God, by the power of God in Christ—so that we can live productive lives in Christ.

**God did not saves you by good works any more than you have babies because of all they’ve done in life.**

Rom 3:21-23 “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed— 22namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. 24But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

This grace is not a self-improvement program.

It’s not a 7 steps to wellness and prosperity scheme.

It’s a rescue mission.

Remember the miners in Chile who were trapped under the earth in a mine for two months. Their situation was desperate. Food rations running low, fatigue, they managed to punch through and find a water source which they rationed.

All while they were trapped below in despairing circumstances—they were unaware of the rescue efforts going on at the surface. Finally the rescuers managed to get through.

The first whole the drilled down to the miners was for communication. To find out how they were doing, but also to relay messages from loved ones and more importantly to communicate the plan for rescue.

The second whole they drilled was for rescue. One by one the Chilean Miners came up. Reunited with their families, coworkers. The last guy up realized that both his mistress and his wife had shown up—both unaware of each other.

No wonder he came up last.

But can you imagine the miners saying, “No thank you. I’ve got this. I can rescue myself in my own effort and in my own strength and smarts.”

Every miner accepted rescue.

Rescue by grace is made possible when you and I understand the dilemma. It is not that we are merely walking with a limp. Or need to get a priorities straight. It’s that we are estranged from God, trapped in darkness, dead in our transgressions—surely headed for eternal judgment.

1 Thess 1:9–10 “how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God 10and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

It’s a gift that is given freely to a person who is not alive. When you’re not alive the only gift that matters is the gift of new life. And we receive it as an act of rescue.

**4. We look forward to the redemption of all things.**

**1 Thess 4:13–18** “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord’s coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18Therefore encourageone another with these words.”

* We should not be ignorant of our hope (13a) “do not…be uninformed.”
* Christ will return with the souls of those who’ve died (14) “god will bring with him those who’ve fallen asleep”
* At his coming he will raise the dead first (15) “we will certainly not precede those who’ve fallen asleep”
* Jesus will return as a Royal conqueror with the spoils of his victory “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, archangel’s voice, trumpet call of God, dead in Christ will rise” (16)—he comes as a royal announcement bringing final salvation in resurrection to the dead.
* Those left behind will be “caught away” or “caught up” to meet the Lord in the clouds, in the air (17a)
  + “caught away” is the word “harpadzo” and it means “to seize away” or to “be caught up into the heavens.” This is the word Paul uses in 2 Cor 12:2 when he states, “I know a man who was “caught up” into the third heaven, whether I was in the body or out of the body I do not know.” The word means **to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control,** ***snatch/take away***[[1]](#footnote-1)**involving the spatial relocation** of someone from one place to another place. It’s word used in Acts for Philip who, after ministering to the Ethiopian Eunuch, was “snatched away” by the Spirit bringing him to another location.
  + “The clouds, in the air” has a dual meaning—the literal reference is to the physical clouds, obviously Jesus ascended up and a cloud of glory hid him from the Disciples’ sight—but it is has a symbolic meaning of “throne”—asceding through the clouds to Yahweh’s throne. The angel told the Apostles, that this same Jesus “will come back in the same way that you’ve seen him going into heaven.” In other words, in the clouds with great glory.
  + “to meet him” is a royal greeting—this is what residents and dignitaries did to visiting officials or to the Caesar—they would go out of the city to “meet” him and return immediately back to the city with him. In the NT this word is only used in contexts where people go out to meet/greet someone of great importance, only to immediately return with them to the city. John 12:13 the residents of Jerusalem go out to meet Jesus and return with him. In Acts 28:15, the Roman Christians come out to the Forum of Appius (45 miles outside of the city) to meet Paul, and return with him. In Matt 25, when the bridegroom arrives outside of the camp, he is announced and the virgins go outside the camp to meet him at the border, then return immediately with him.

Titus 2:13 “while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

The blessed hope of the Church is the glorious return of Jesus. We hope in a day in which all creation will be redeemed; at Christ’s glorious return bringing with him those who have died in the faith. When Jesus resurrects the dead, and reunites the living in the air—and return to this world as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the one hope that all believers have.

This is the only hope for this world that is damned and otherwise lost in sin.

Let us pray for hope today.

1. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)