

- ***READ Ephesians 4:1-6*** As we have noted during our previous studies of the truths found in these verses, there is a proper foundation by which our spiritually must be built. According to what the Apostle Paul writes in these verses, that foundation must be built upon the truths that there is truly only one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. If we will be a people who acknowledge and accept these things as being true and if we will be committed to live by their truths, then we can be a growing and thriving people who are extremely profitable for the sake of the kingdom.
- One of the most important parts of this list is the part that helps to motivate us forward in this life, it is the part that gives us peace of mind and security of soul, and that is the one hope by which we have been called. If we did not have something to look forward to in the future, then why would we be willing to sacrifice so much of ourselves in order to live according to God's will? If we did not have something that gives us peace and security during times of great difficulty, then would we even be able to make it to that place in the future where God's promises will be realized? You see...hope is the lifeblood of what drives the disciple forward in faithful service to God.
- Yet, we might be asking...what exactly is hope? We've already mentioned that hope gives motivation, peace, and security, but what is hope itself? The Christian's hope differs from the way that we most often use the word "hope." I might say something like, *"I sure hope the Vols show some fight and wins some tough football games this year,"* but that is nothing more than wishful thinking because the truth is that I have no reason to expect for that to happen. This is different from the Christian's hope because **our hope is found in that place where desire is coupled together with reasonable expectation.** It isn't just that we wish something would take place, but our hope is something that ought to drive us forward because we desire that which we believe will actually take place. If we can't have confidence in what we believe is coming in the future...if we can't trust in what promises have been given to us by God...then there are going to be very few disciples who are going to be able and willing to sacrifice all that God demands we sacrifice for Him.
- This morning, we are going to consider this one hope of our calling. We are going to give strong attention to the hope that each of us should hold on to from our very souls. We're going to begin by talking about what our hope should not be in. Then we will focus on the true nature of our hope, and we will finish off talking about how it is that we can have such a hope right now within our lives.

I. **Our hope is not founded in earthly things.**

A. **The disciple's greatest desires should not be for things of this life.**

1. Paul doesn't mince words too much when he instructs the Colossian brethren to keep their minds focused on things above. ***"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth."*** (Colossians 3:1,2)
2. Paul's expectation was for disciples to be changed within their minds and their approach to this world. He speaks of being raised with Christ, and we know from **Romans 6:4** that those who have been raised from the dead through Christ are new creatures. As new creatures we are to think differently concerning the things of this life. Our desires are to be changed to reflect the new focus that we have in this life.
3. We are not to desire earthly greatness in the form of riches and material wealth because we know that these things are passing away, being stolen by thieves, and destroyed by rust and moths, and if our greatest desire is for these things then we too will pass away and be left with nothing. **(I John 2:15-17 & Matthew 6:19-21)** Our desires should be redirected towards spiritual riches that will be eternally beneficial to us.

B. Not only will our desires in earthly things let us down...but our expectations for men to give us great things will also come up short.

1. So often our desires for present greatness are fueled by the great promises that are given by men who believe they can deliver on such promises. We see this all around us in so many different places, but in no other place is this more seen than in the arena of politics. While there are some politicians that who have great integrity and are willing to work very hard to fulfill promises made on the campaign trail...there are all the more of those who simply make empty promises to gain a vote or trust without any intention of coming through on their swelling words and promises. Again, I use politics as an example, but the truth is that this is true in many different areas of our lives, and I'm sure we have all seen this very thing being true.
2. This isn't something that should surprise us because the Bible warns against putting great trust in the hands of men who are so quick to make great promises. I think first and foremost about the children of Israel during the time when they were so desirous for a king to rule them. No doubt there was a faction of men who were making great promises about how great a king would treat the people and the heights to which the people would be taken by a king.
3. However, Scripture shows us that their hope for a king that would lead them into never before seen national prosperity would actually lead them to great problems. The Lord makes this extremely clear in **I Samuel 8:10-20**. Their kings would take their children for his service. He would take their harvest for his consumption. He would take of their livestock for his benefit. The end result would be them crying out over the unforeseen problems their kings would bring, but the Lord wouldn't hear them because they had rejected God as their hope and instead put it in the care of fallible men.
4. This isn't to say that we shouldn't respect others and their promises. The ideal world would include men who kept their promises to only those things that they are actually willing to do, but that isn't always the case. We then should, therefore, temper our expectations of mere men, and do as **Psalm 146:3** states, "*Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation.*" Instead we must put our hope fully and only in our Lord who has and will continue to fulfill His promises.

II. Our hope is founded in God and Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His Resurrection, & His promises.

A. Our Father and Jesus have promised tremendous promises to those who will follow them.

1. We often think about hope and the promises of God as being things that are always in the far away future, but the reality is that there are many promises of the Father and Jesus that we see coming true within our lives each and every day. The greatest of which is the fact that we can be in fellowship with God through our obedience to the Gospel. There was a great promise given by Peter in **Acts 2:38**. He promised forgiveness of sins and receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who repent and be baptized in the name of Christ Jesus. The promise of forgiveness continues into our lives as disciples for John says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (**I John 1:9**)
2. The promises continue to be fulfilled in our lives as we consider the fact that God has promised deliverance to those who desire to overcome the temptations of Satan. In **James 4:7,8**, James writes, "*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" The promise is clear and simple. When Satan comes up against us, if we will resist him then he will flee from us. Yet, we shouldn't take this to mean that he sees us as being great and able to withstand him. Instead, we'll notice in the text that this happens when we draw near to God and lean upon Him. Paul adds to this promise in **I Corinthians 10:13** when he writes, "*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*" God promises us escape and deliverance through His great strength.

3. Lastly, let's consider that God promises us peace during the difficulties of this life. In **Philippians 4:6,7**, Paul promises disciples that we are able to live our lives with the peace of God in our lives. This peace is a peace that the world cannot comprehend as we are guarded within our hearts and our minds through Christ Jesus.
 4. These are all things that we hope for in this life. Our hope is often realized as we come to have these promises as realities within our lives, but we know that there are also great things that we hope for that will not come until later on in the future. Paul says in **I Corinthians 15:19**, "*If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are all men most to be pitied.*" We will look more into our future hope this evening, but before we look at those things, let's consider quickly that we can reasonably desire these things from God because He and Jesus have shown themselves as being more than capable of fulfilling their promises to us.
- B. We can trust in His promises because He has shown the ability to do amazing things.
1. John Piper wrote concerning our hope, "*The Christian hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will come to pass.*" Our hope, as we have pointed out, is not just desire for anything but it is desire for that which we can reasonably expect. I believe this to be what Piper meant when he wrote that we can have confidence in the fact that God will fulfill every single promise that He has made to us. We can reasonably believe that God will give us those things because He has proven Himself as trustworthy.
 2. While not a good example but simply to show that God keeps His word, consider that God told Adam and Eve that in the day they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would die...and that is exactly what happened when they were separated from God because of their sin. (**Genesis 3**) A little later on just after the flood, we see God making a promise to Noah that He would never again destroy the earth with water. He even gave the rainbow as a symbol of this promise (**Genesis 9:9-17**), and to this day the earth remains free of such another calamity. Then of course there are the great promises given to Abraham that are found in **Genesis 12**. God promised Abraham a great land, a great people bearing his name, and a great blessing to all people that would come through his seed. The land and nation promise are noted as being fulfilled in **Joshua 21:43-45**, and of course we know the great blessing of salvation in Jesus Christ being the fulfillment of that final promise. The words of **Joshua 21:45** ring ever true, "*Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.*"
 3. The greatest of course being that final promise that benefits all people who have ever lived on this earth, the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. Paul uses this great act of love shown by the Father and the Son as proof for confidence in our hope. In **Romans 8** beginning in **v.23**, we see Paul speaking of the great desire that all of those who have been adopted of God ought to have...the redemption of our bodies. He goes on to say in the next verse that this is something that we hope for because it has not yet been seen. "*For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees.*" (**Romans 8:24**) We have not yet experienced the redemption of our bodies, but we can have confidence that it sure will take place, and Paul states the reason for our confidence in **Romans 8:32**. "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over to us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" The point? I think we see it pretty clearly! If God was willing to give us the very life of His Son, then He is serious about the promises that He has made to us, those we have discussed this morning and many more we could consider. This means that we surely can be a people who live in hope confidently desiring those things promised by our God. This hope should be very appealing to us because it can often be the very thing that helps us to make the difficult decisions that faith in God demands be made. We should want this hope!

III. We can possess this great hope if we will live according to our calling.

A. This hope should help to sustain us as we journey throughout this life.

1. If ever there was an example of what hope can do in the life of a disciple who faced difficult circumstances...sure that example would be the Apostle Paul, and we see that very thing being evident in **Acts 26** as he gives his defense before King Agrippa. Paul states very plainly that he stands before him on trial, *"For the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am accused by Jews."* (**Acts 26:6,7**) Paul was on trial because his hope had such an impact on his life that he lived a certain way in hope of obtaining to God's promises.
2. This hope of Paul is surely seen all throughout his life as a disciple, and it is what carried him through the many trials that he endured for Christ. Everything he endured he was willing to go through because he hoped in the promises that these sufferings would be producing something great within him. He writes about that hope of future greatness in **II Corinthians 4:16-5:10**. He was willing to endure momentary affliction because he hoped in eternal reward. He endured the mistreatment of this body because he hoped, *"to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven."* (**II Corinthians 5:2**) If this was Paul's mindset then it most certainly must be the way that we approach this life, and we can do so if we will commit ourselves to living the right way.

B. We can't truly live by this hope if we are not faithful to the One who provides it.

1. This is Paul's very point in what he writes to the Colossians in **Colossians 1**. He seeks to remind them of *"the hope laid up for you in heaven."* (**Colossians 1:5**) This hope was available to them because of what Jesus did for us in the giving of His life. (**Colossians 1:13-20**) The results for us are fantastic because we now are no longer alienated from God because of our evil deeds! We have the ability to be reconciled to God and presented to Him in holiness, blamelessness, and beyond reproach. (**Colossians 1:21-22**)
2. However...we must take notice that Paul goes on to say that this hope we now have is contingent on our willingness to *"continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard."* If we want to be a people who have hope then we must be a people who live like we have hope in a righteous God rewarding those who have given everything to be faithful and obedient to Him. We can't hope for glory if we are not willing to live in holiness and righteousness. The hope of glory is graciously offered to us by God, but He demands that we then live as a people who are truly His people.

And what a blessing it is to be His people and to live with such wonderful hope within our lives. Yet, we recognize that this hope isn't something that we get to create ourselves, but it is a hope that is founded upon the promises of God. It is a hope that is the foundation by which we were called to be His people. We were called out of darkness into His light so that we might have the great hope of fellowship with Him in this life and especially in eternity. When life really gets difficult, may we be a people who lean heavily upon the hope by which we were called, and may that hope sustain us all the way to the end.

PRAYER *Our Father in heaven...we approach you this morning at the close of our consideration of Your Word being so very thankful to be counted as those who have been called in hope to live for You in this life. We know the difficulties of this life are real and numerous, but we give You honor, glory, and thanks for the hope that sustains us. We thank You that our hope is not founded in earthy possessions or mere men, but that our faith is founded fully in Your promises and those things that You have done to show us that You will always keep Your promises. We praise You as a faithful God, and we hope to be a faithful people to You always. Bless us in all that we do. Strengthen our faith and hope day by day, and may we have our hope realized when we spend eternity with You in that land of rest You have promised for us. It is in Jesus's name that we pray these things...amen.*