

The Thrill of Hope

A Lord's Flock General Assembly Topic

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Christmas reminds us that there is hope in our present suffering. This paradox is a contradictory statement that we wrestle with each and every day of our lives. God wants us to learn to find hope in the hard places of life. *"A shoot (a small bud) will come up from the stump (the bottom of a tree) of Jesse; from his roots, a Branch will bear fruit"* (Isaiah 11:1). Isaiah saw hope in the midst of oppression. This passage assures all of us that in the middle of our present circumstances, the Christmas season brings us the thrill of hope. Hope is here; hope is alive..." (1 Peter 1:3). When we are down to nothing, God is up to something.

1. What does "thrill of hope" mean?

1.1 It is the hope that Jesus brought to us. "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have. But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:24-25).

1.2 Hope is not floating in the surface of our situation. Real hope is way down in the bottom. It is an anchor to which we can hold on tight in times of struggles.

1.3 There are seasons in our lives that we do not want but often times, these are the most fruitful ones, when we learn so much from them. The pruning season is when we experience being cut-off or cut down, but in the end, we shall experience the promise of God.

1.4 The thrill of hope is there when God is silent; the expectation of hope is there when we are tired or when we get a bad report from the doctor or when we experience financial difficulty.

2. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was not easy or pretty like our celebrations today.

2.1 Joseph and Mary struggled physically and emotionally with Jesus' conception. Mary was a virgin and they were not yet married.

2.2 Jesus' birth happened not in an ideal situation; they had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem just to fulfill the prophecy; moreover, they could not find a place to stay, and ended up in a manger.

- Through Jesus' difficult birth, God reveals His ways. God comes into our weakness so that we will know that in our weakness, He is strong. God will give us the opportunity to bounce back. "What no eye has seen no ear has heard and no man has imagine what God has prepared for those love him" (1 Cor.2:9).

3. God likes to do things the hard way.

3.1 Moses led the Israelites in fleeing the Egyptian army, and crossing an ocean.

3.2 God used David, a simple shepherd boy to kill Goliath with a piece of rock.

3.3 Gideon's army of 32,000 men was reduced by God to 300.

Conclusion:

We may be having a hard season, but God is preparing us for a big comeback. The thrill of hope is sometimes hidden, but springs from the hard places (1 Cor. 2:9). God is working silently in our lives, without us knowing it. When we are weary, and can not see the light at the end of the tunnel, let us recall that in that holy night, our Savior brought us hope. That thrill of hope brings us to rejoicing despite our weariness. "A thrill of hope ... the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn . . ."

Reflection:

1. What hard season/pruning season are you experiencing at this very moment? How can you overcome it?
2. Can you see new life, new beginnings and the living hope rising now amidst your struggles?

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