

***Pass It On -
Living In Hope***

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

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Well, he was hoping.

Claims to be my friend, but I had to wonder, given how much he was hoping that it would happen.

Was last Wednesday afternoon, when I hauled my boat out of the water for the winter. That's a process involving a crane, and raising a 5000 lb object 10 feet into the air. Which is a process for which I carry zero certification and in which I had zero experience.

He heard about it and came to watch.

Hoping that somewhere along the way I'd make a wrong move and get knocked over the edge and into the harbour.

Sorry, John - sorry that your hopes were dashed.....

....this time, anyway.

Hope -

When you are in a present situation but looking for another one to come in the future.

You look toward it.

You can imagine it.

You work for it.

You do all this - but you don't see the outcome yet.

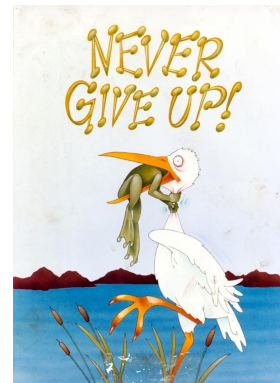
It's still around the corner.

It's still out of reach.

You **HOPE** for it.

And that **hope** keeps you going.

Like this frog - **hoping** the bird gets tired first.



Hope.

It's described in our reading.

2 Corinthians was written by a person whose life was anything **but** easy. Paul was a pastor who faced opposition from a lobby group in the Corinthian Church. And he faced opposition from the civic authorities who had a habit of trying to kill him. And he struggled with some sort of ongoing disability that was a real burden - a drain on his life.

Pastor Paul's body didn't work well.

His neighbors didn't like him.

And his parishoners were trying to get rid of him.

In that context come these words that describe **HOPE**.

Check out verses 8-13:

8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;

9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;.....

*...11 living under the constant threat of death
and yet.... 13... continuing to preach...*



Know the picture that first came to my mind as I read these verses? I immediately visualized Paul like a plastic punching clown - the type that keeps bouncing back up with a dumb grin on its face, no matter HOW hard we hit the thing.

But then I had to toss it aside because that picture doesn't do Paul justice.

He's not dumb.
Nor thoughtless.
Nor without feeling.

He doesn't live with a cheap smile painted on a phony exterior of his life.

Paul's hope is NOT plastic.
Or easily deflated by some sharp poke.

His hope is real.
It is robust.

It is proclaimed not only in these opening words, but summarized wonderfully in verse 16:

**So we do not lose heart.
Even though our outer nature is wasting away,
our inner nature is being renewed day by day.**

The key phrase is there at the beginning:

We do not lose heart

Where life's knocks might drain his joy and energy and vision and courage away
something else fills it back up again
and allows him to declare -
We do not lose heart...

How was that?

And what can we find here for our lives as we face
somewhere along the way
all of us
our own knocks and discouragements and pains?

When John came down to the sailing club **hoping** to see someone fall into the water, I was also **hoping**.

Hoping that my boat would make it safely onto the trailer.
And all my hopes were dangling on two thick canvas straps.
One at the back of the tub.
One at the front.
Thankfully they didn't let me down.

The **hope** for Christian living dangles on two straps, so to speak:

One described at the back, before verse 16.

The other described at the front, after verse 16.

Those two straps keep hope from dashing to pieces on the hard stuff of life.

Two straps holding up our hope.

The first at the back - before the verse.

Catch the little word at the beginning of verse 16 - our central verse for today.

...SO...

Meaning - the reason for not giving up is found in the verses preceding verse 16.

That is, in verses 7 to 15.

And then the second strap - Slip just past the end of verse 16, the key verse, and notice how verse 17 begins....

...For...

in other words "**because of...**"

The condition in verse 16 -- HOPE -- happens **because of..... FOR** the reasons described in verses 17 and 18.

When life as we see and experience it here on earth is clearly unwinding, how can we still live with a positive spirit? How can we still keep going?

Look at the back strap that holds up our hope:

Three themes are woven together in verses 7-15.

The first is **the presence of God's power in our lives.**

As we struggle, we pray for the life of Jesus to show itself in our lives. (v.10)

That only happens through the Holy Spirit.

And the presence of the Spirit is promised again and again in Scripture to all who confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. If you are a Christ follower, you can rest certain that the Holy Spirit will flow the Power of God into your life - no matter where you are, no matter what your challenges. And that power will help you to keep going.

So pray for it.

And watch for it.

And give thanks when you notice it.

The presence of God's power in our lives.

Someone shared with me once about some very difficult memories that he was having to face. They were bubbling up from deep in his past. He was working it through, and along the way, as we were talking once, he looked up at me and said, "You know, it's gotta be God..... The only way that I am able to keep dealing with all this junk is that God is giving me the energy to do it.... and you know - if God keeps giving, I'll be able to keep going."

That's hope.

That's what Romans 8 declares so powerfully:

26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress.... [he] prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words....

31 What can we say... If God is for us, who can ever be against us?....

38 ...I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away.

39 Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's one theme that makes up the back strap of hope.

The second one is found in verse 12 and 15.

We pray that somehow, even through our struggles, **people can see God's grace at work in winsome ways.**

That while we're on the road to death, somehow the life of Jesus might be conveyed to others.

That somehow, even in the pain, people can be drawn closer in their relationship to the Lord.

Like the mother in the hospital bed who whispered to me, *"If going through this will help to wake my child up and bring her to her knees, it will be worth it."*

The prayer that somehow God, in his sovereign way, won't allow our struggle to fall worthlessly to the ground, but will weave it into his divine purposes.

That's the second strand woven into the back strap of hope.

The third strand is found in verse 14 - looking ahead to share in the resurrection.

Remembering that what we've got now isn't all.

There's more to come.

So hang in there!

Like Wietse, who was translated to glory recently, but went with peace - **in spite** of the struggle and indignity that Parkinson's brings. With what little facility he had left, he could communicate hope to his family because he knew that what he endured now wasn't the whole story. A big, grand chapter lay ahead.

Which brings us to the front strap that holds up hope. A strap firmly anchored in the future.

That's verse 17 and 18.

Telling us that what we struggle with today is.... *are you ready?*...

- **momentary**

- **light**

Now wait!

Don't brush Paul off as some arm-chair quarterback, as an out of touch ivory tower academic.

In chapter 11 of this same letter he describes some of his experiences as an apprentice to and representative of Jesus Christ.

24 Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.

26 I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not.

27 I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

AND YET -

Hard though that all was

And long though each experience was -

- imagine the shipwreck, how each hour in the storm must have seemed like an entire week!

they are nothing when placed up against the timeline of eternity.

Some years ago I was privileged to meet someone who struggled with pain from the age of 30 onward. He'd been in an industrial accident that crushed his spine. Every day was agony. I met him when he was in his 60's.

And he said to me, "*I've been popping pain pills, and dreading the arrival of low pressure systems, for over 30 years. Sometimes it seems like forever. Then I remind myself that once I'm in heaven, it'll be just a tiny blip.*"

Our struggle is **momentary**.

The pain and frustration of today is **not** the final chapter in our existence.

It **doesn't** have the last word.

AND our struggle is

Light.

Paul could have easily felt sorry for himself.

Compared to a rich businessman sitting in a Roman storefront, it seems awful.

But Paul doesn't compare himself to that.

Instead, he compares his present situation to what awaits believers in eternity.

That's the stuff that Paul calls "*an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure...*"

My minivan is heavy compared to a smart car.

But when I was driving down the 401 recently, and looking WAAAAYYYYY up at an 18 wheeler, it seemed incredibly small and light.

The struggles of his life seemed temporary and light

because

Paul looked at what was eternal and gloriously weighty.

.....Because he looked to eternity.

If he never thought about eternal glory, the size of the problems of his life would have begun to grow in his mind.

If he never thought about the weighty future that God has promised, the chaotic noise of everyday life would have overwhelmed and defeated him.

So he looked ahead.

Which I encourage you to do, too.

If you're not sure how to do that, go home and do a careful read of 1 Corinthians 15.

And if you still run stuck, call me.

It describes that glory.

And then the closing verse of 1 Corinthians 15 says,

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain

That's hope.

Held up by two straps.

The back strap woven together by:

- God's presence in our lives
- God working our pain to another's good
- the promise of eternity

And the front strap, being sure to compare today to the weight of glory yet to come.

Both straps keeping hope from crashing to ground, and crumbling to pieces.

Friends, we **all** face decay.

It'll smack everyone of us in the face somewhere along the way.

Sometimes later.

Sometimes sooner.

Perhaps through aging. Or disease. Or conflict. Or challenges because of our faith.

Whatever the difficulty - the question is how we'll approach them.

Will we allow the difficulties to dictate our response?

Or will Christ-empowered hope rise above them?

Hope based in:

constant prayer for God's power to be active

prayer that our struggle will bring good to others, and draw others to Christianity

prayerfully remembering the better day yet ahead

reminding ourselves to compare the struggle of today to the weight of glory.

Hope - it's living with a fork always in your hand.

Some of you have heard the story, I'm sure.

Of mother - who, as the table was being cleared after the main course of dinner, would always tell the children, "Keep your fork. The best is yet to come." And then she'd serve dessert.

When she was on her deathbed she asked the pastor to make sure that at her wake there would be a fork in her hand.

Which happened.

And when people filed by, and wondered why, the children could say through their tears, but with hope and faith rising in their hearts - "Mother wanted us to remember that it's not over. The best is yet to come."

Brothers and sisters - hold onto your fork.

The best **IS** yet to come.