

Replacing Fear with Hope

John 20:1-18

April 4, 2010

Oh what a difference a year makes! It was at this time a year ago, we were in the worst financial crisis of the decade, our country was getting used to a new president, and fear seemed to grip the entire country. How about today? Do you feel any better? Do you have hope that transcends the ups and downs of life? Where do you find hope?

I. Hope ...The Search for a preferred future!

A. What is hope?

1. The American Heritage Dictionary defines hope as “the feeling that . . . events will turn out for the best.” Our passage suggests that our hope is anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not just a feeling that things will work out!
2. Both optimists and pessimists have hope! Do you want proof? The optimist invents the airplane and the pessimist invents the parachute.
3. Christian hope is based on the certainty of God’s promises and His character. Even when faith falters, hope comes to the rescue. It is that long rope that keeps us linked to the sovereignty and power of God.
4. Lewis Smedes wrote, “Is there hope when the situation is hopeless? That question leads us to Christian hope; for us hope is no longer a passion for the possible. It becomes a passion for the promise.”

B. Mary was looking for hope (John 20:1-18)

John focuses on the resurrection as seen through the eyes of 1 woman. What was she looking for?

1. She of all people needed hope. She had believed the message of hope from this itinerant preacher and now he

was dead. Mary Magdalene came early while it was still dark. She saw the stone, she didn't go in. She mistakenly believes that his body has been moved or stolen. She ran and she gives the report that body snatchers have stolen the body and they don't know where it is. (v.1-2)

2. John (the other disciple) and Peter needed hope. They were summoned to the tomb by Mary to see for themselves (note: probably a few miles away in Bethany). John (who is younger and more reverent) gets there first and waits for Peter. Peter impulsively barges into the tomb and to his amazement everything is folded up neatly, but Jesus is not there. (v.3-8).
3. They believe He isn't there but they haven't figured out what exactly has happened. (v. 9)
4. Finally, Mary peeks into the tomb herself with tears cascading down her cheeks. The angels ask her why she is crying and she repeats the story again (v.10-13).
5. Then something so poetic even magical happens. She turns to leave and sees a third man who she assumed was the caretaker or gardener. For the 3rd time she asks for the body. (v.14-15).
6. Jesus reveals himself to her and she runs back to the disciples and declares, "I have seen the Lord!" (v.16-18)
 - When we see Jesus for who He really is, our despair, our searching, our longings are fulfilled. She had found what she was looking for!
 - You still haven't found what you're looking for (U2).

C. What are you looking for? Are you looking for...?

1. **Peace**...in a worn torn world. In the Middle East? Iraq? Afghanistan?
2. **Justice**...in an unfair world. Will the oppressed ever be vindicated?

3. **Prosperity**...in a financially troubled world. Is the stock market worth trusting? Is this recovery short-lived?
4. **Love**... in a sex craved world. Will there be someone who will love you unconditionally? Have you been hurt by someone you once trusted?
5. **Lasting Friendship**...in a transient world. People come and go in our life. There is no stability.
6. **Family**... in a broken world. You just want a family that sticks together...that loves each other and doesn't fight.
7. **Success**... in an illusionary world. "Too many people climb the ladder of success only to find that it's leaning against the wrong wall" What does success look like for you?
8. **Security**...in a desperate world. Is there someone or something you can cling too? What are you afraid of?

Transition: I think security may be the biggest need people are facing today! We are worried, fretful, nervous and even fearful! We are afraid!

II. Fear...The Stress of the Unknown!

A. God says don't be afraid!

1. Someone had defined fear as: **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal! God says "*Fear not*" over 350 times in the Bible.
2. What are you afraid of? God can give us hope in the midst of our fears!
 - What were the first words the **angels** said after Jesus rose from the dead? "Don't be afraid!"
 - What were the first words **Jesus** said after he rose from the dead? "Don't be afraid!"
 - What were the first words the **disciples** heard Jesus say when he met them as a group? "Don't be afraid!" That's the message of Easter. And 2,000 years later it's still relevant.

B. Fear is...

1. We call fear by many names. We call it worry, tension, anxiety, and stress. **One study looked at 500 different people and discovered 7,000 different fears – an average of 14 different fears per person.** This is not some minor issue; it's absolutely critical.
2. Why? It's contagious. It's limiting. It's draining. It's the dark room where negativity develops.
3. And, most importantly, God doesn't want you to be afraid. *Ephesians 3:12 (NIV) says, "In Christ we can come before God with freedom and without fear. We can do this through faith in Christ."*

III. Faith... The solution to life's greatest challenges?

A. **Accept** God's love

1. *"Where God's love is, there is no fear because God's perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).* The Bible says the opposite of love is fear, and the opposite of fear is love. Love and fear can't operate together. When love comes in the front door of your life, fear goes out the back door. Love is the antidote to fear.
2. Our deepest need in life is to feel absolutely, totally, unconditionally loved – not for something we could be or should be, but loved just as we are. Until this issue is resolved, we will be tormented by our fears. Only God can love us with as much love as we really need.
3. We were created just so He can love us. He knows everything about us. And He wants us to know Him and love him back. That's why He sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life, to die on the cross for us, and to rise again. That's what Easter hope is all about.
4. *Psalms 39:7* ⁷*"And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You."*

B. **Believe** that Jesus died and rose again

1. It's one thing to believe *about* something; it's another thing to believe *in* something. It's one thing to believe about a person; it's another thing to believe in a person. There are a lot of people who believe God is real. So what! Believing in Jesus' death and resurrection is more than just head knowledge.
2. *Hebrews 2:14-15 (NLT) "Only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying."*
3. *I Tim. 4:10 For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men,*
4. People don't like to talk about death. They don't even like the word death. Why? They don't know what's going to happen after they die, and they're not ready to meet God. The only way we can be ready to meet God is by having a relationship with Him. That can only happen because of Jesus' death and resurrection.
5. When you believe what Jesus says about the future is true, then you can stop being afraid of death. That's part of the good news of Easter.
6. *Titus 3:7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

C. **Commit** your fears and your life to Christ

1. Part of the reason so many people are so scared today is that they've placed their trust in the wrong places. They've placed their trust in power, in possessions, in prestige and prosperity!
2. That's called idolatry. Placing trust in anything other than God violates the first commandment: *You shall have no other gods before me.* Anytime we let this happen,

we're making something else into a god. And when something of this world becomes more important than God, fear is sure to come.

- If making money is the number one goal in your life, you will develop a fear of losing it all.
 - If success is the most important thing, a fear of failure will develop.
 - If being married or having a girlfriend/boyfriend is your passion, fear of abandonment will develop.
 - If security is what you are sold out for, then any threat to it your family becomes a fear.
3. Think of something that scares or worries you! Whatever “that” is, there’s a good chance that what is what is competing with God in your life.
 4. *1 Peter 3:14-15 says, “Don’t be afraid of anyone and don’t worry, but have reverence for Christ in your heart and honor him as Lord” (Good News).*
 5. The only real antidote to the fear that you are facing now is a commitment to Christ. When you make him Lord of their life, you don’t have to fear losing anything. He becomes the only person you ultimately have to please.
 6. Justin Martyr, born around 100 AD to pagan parents; he grew up studying philosophy. But while in Ephesus he was impressed by the steadfastness of Christians under persecution and converted to Christianity. He is known for his “Apologies,” defenses of the faith addressed to those in highest power: the Roman Emperor and the Roman Senate. Justin boldly defended the lives of his persecuted fellow Christians. For publically debating and defending the Christian beliefs in public, he was tried before a Roman prefect. When he refused to deny his faith, he was beheaded. But it was Justin’s hope in Christ that enabled him to boldly and sacrificially defend the truth.

D. **Decide** that this Easter will be different!

1. Some of you have heard this message over and over. Today is the day to once and for all give your life to Christ! This is the freedom you are looking for this Easter. This is the hope I am talking about. If you only come to church on Easter and Christmas, then make a choice to let God Change your life and your priorities!
2. If you have doubts, here this! A man doubts, not because he cannot believe, but because he will not believe! “A man rejects God neither because of intellectual demands nor because of the scarcity of evidence. A man rejects God because of a moral resistance that refuses to admit his need for God.” ~Ravi Zacharias
3. John 14:6 – answers 3 of life’s most compelling Q’s!
 - How can I be saved? *“I am the way”*
 - How can I be sure? *“I am the truth”*
 - How can I be satisfied? *“I am the life”*
4. The first Easter changed the world. Nothing has ever been the same. Even secular historians will admit that whatever happened on that first Easter morning, the history of the world changed forever. Do you want the power of God in your life – the power that eliminates fear – the kind of power you can only get through the cross? The kind that gives you hope?

E. As we go remember these 2 things!

1. Hope does not **disappoint!**

⁵and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom. 5:5)

2. We have a **future!**

¹¹'for I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. (Jer. 29:11)

¹⁸Surely there is a future and your hope will not be cut off.
Prov. 23:18 cf. 24:14

3. Will you ask Jesus to be your hope today?

Table Talk:

1. What do you tend to put your trust or hope in?
2. When do you think most about God?
3. What would your reaction have been if you came to an empty tomb?
4. What will your response to Jesus be today?

Sneak Peek:

Next week will continue our series entitled, “The Journey... Walking as Jesus Walked. Please read John 4: 46-54. It is Jesus 2nd recorded miracle in Galilee. He heals a royal official’s son, without even being in physical proximity. Here are some questions to ponder...

1. Why was this miracle so significant?
2. Does God still heal people today?
3. How many different people did Jesus impact through this miracle?

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