

# ***A Hope and a Future***

## ***6. Contagious Hope***

October 18, 2020

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This is the last message in our “A Hope and Future” series. Over the last 5 weeks we have feasted on the goodness of God and learned how to embrace the hope he offers us. If you’ve been with us on the journey, you’ve heard our theme verse **Jeremiah 29:11**. Instead of me reading it to you again, let’s read it aloud together:

*For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

What a tremendous promise for you and me. We don’t have to be afraid of what God wants to do in our lives --- his plan is not to harm us. His plan is to give us a hope and a future. God is *for* us.

If we have hope for God’s future for our lives, we need to remember that God calls us **to spread hope to others**. God spoke the promise of Jeremiah 29:11 to the Jewish people who were living in exile in Babylon. The Jews were defeated, discouraged and mourning the loss of the land of Israel that God had given them. They had little hope for the future. Yet, when the prophet Jeremiah delivered this promise from God, they began to think that they had a future after all.

God wanted his people in Babylon to be encouraged, but not only for their sake. The hope and a future God gave the Jews were part of his eternal plan. God told the Jews that they had a future as a people – they would not be assimilated into the Babylonian empire and disappear. That promise was not only for their comfort, it was for the world, because God planned for Jesus the Savior to come out of the Jewish people. God promised the Jews that they would return to their land, not only so they could enjoy it, but also because God planned for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. So -- the promise of a hope and a future that God gave the captive Jews was not for them alone; it was also for the sake of God’s people thousands of years in the future.

God has plans for you and me – plans to give us a hope and future. I pray that encourages you today. God does not want you to despair or to give up. We have reason to hope. *And* God gives us his hope not for our sakes alone – he calls us to pass our hope on to others. He gives us a future so that we can help others have a future, too.

***The hope that God gives us is contagious.***

God calls us to give away what we receive from him. That is a Kingdom principal. A story in 2 Kings 7 illustrates this well. Let me set the scene: The nation of the Arameans was attacking northern Israel. They surrounded the city of Samaria and laid siege. That means they surrounded it so that nothing could get in or out of the city. The

Arameans were waiting for the city's people to starve and then give up. And the strategy was working. Chapter 6 tells us that conditions had gotten so bad that the desperate Samaritans were starting to resort to cannibalism.

Let's pick up the story in *2 Kings 7:3* *Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate.* These four lepers didn't have much hope for their futures.

1 They were isolated from society. They were outside the city gate because they weren't allowed to go near other people, not even friends or family. They lived with other lepers in a leper colony. They couldn't work or go to a market. If they saw someone coming toward them, they were required to warn people to stay away by yelling, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Now, that's extreme social distancing!) So they were isolated.

2 They felt cursed by God. In those days, lepers were told that they were sick because they had offended God. So these men had lost their health, their families, their jobs, and their place in society. And on top of that, they were taught that God was angry at them. So they had little hope for their future.

*vv. 3-4 They said to each other, "Why stay here until we die? 4 If we say, 'We'll go into the city'—the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die."*

These guys were calculating their chances. Go into the city and it's 100% certain they would die of starvation or go out toward the enemy where there was a *slight possibility* – let's say 5% --- that the enemy would have mercy on them and let them live. So they choose slight chance over no chance.

*v. 5 At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, 6 for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" 7 So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives.*

The lepers weren't killed; instead they found an empty Aramean camp! There were no soldiers, but there was enough food to feed an army – literally. It was a windfall!

*v. 8 The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp, entered one of the tents and ate and drank. Then they took silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.*

What a change! These guys went from the brink of starvation to a lavish feast. They went from being penniless to stashing away savings. But after a while, something didn't feel right.

**v. 9 Then they said to each other, “What we’re doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let’s go at once and report this to the royal palace.”**

They realize that while they are stuffing themselves, there is a whole city filled with people who are starving and dying. The lepers knew that the threat against the city was gone, but no one else did. They said, “**This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.**” And they knew that it wasn’t right for them to live it up while others were dying. So they went back to their city and told the leadership the good news that they had a hope and future and the city was saved.

Many of us have been given a hope and a future by Jesus. But many people where we live, work, and play are **starving for hope**. 2020 has been a bad year.

- Some people lost their jobs. Parents are trying to teach their kids at home while they juggle all their other responsibilities.
- Some feel isolated, cut off from family and friends.
- Some have stopped speaking to each other over political divisions.
- Students wonder if they will be able to go to school – or whether there will get a job after they graduate.
- A federal agency that operates a suicide prevention hotline said it registered a 1,000% increase in the number of calls compared to the same time last year.

People are starving for hope, and *those of us who have hope in Christ get to be the ones to share it with them!*

### **How do we do that? What can we do?**

There is an infinite variety of ways God can use our lives to reach others. But I’ll share one way to be intentional about giving away your hope - “BLESS” people. “BLESS” is an acrostic that stands for rhythms of how we can pass on our faith. We teach this more completely in our class MD1 – which you can now take on line. But here’s a quick rundown on what it means:

#### **1. Begin with prayer**

Pray for the people where you live, work, play, or study to know the life of Jesus.

#### **2. L & E stand for Listen & Eat**

In other words, hang out with them – get to know them. Eating with people and asking them about their story is a great way to do this.

#### **3. S stands for Serve**

As you get to know people, stay alert for any way you can help them. It could be big or little.

#### **4. S stands for Share your experience**

At some point we need to speak about our experience of knowing Jesus or people will never know about it. Can you imagine if the Lepers said, “We don’t need to say anything about what we found -- we’ll just let people see our example of not starving to death and maybe they will ask us how we’re still alive.” No, they went back to tell the king and the people about the abundance they

found. So we need to speak about the hope we have found – and one way to do that is by thinking through how we can tell our story. In MD1 we teach what is called the “3-minute testimony” – what I was like before knowing Jesus, how I came into a growing relationship with him, and what it’s been like following him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been an inspiration to millions of people over the years. He was a theologian and a leader of the underground church in Germany during WW 2. Just before he was imprisoned by the Nazis, he got engaged to a young woman named Maria. They wrote to each other frequently. Maria even marked out on her bedroom floor the outline of his cell, so that she could write to him as though she were with him and share more deeply in his imprisonment. While in prison, Dietrich wrote Maria a poem titled, “*New Year 1945.*” He wanted to give her hope; that in spite of the darkness and the danger, that they could trust in God with their futures.

Two of the stanzas are:

**Should it be ours to drain the cup of grieving  
even to the dregs of pain, at thy command,  
we will not falter, thankfully receiving  
all that is given by thy loving hand.**

**While all the powers of Good aid and attend us,  
boldly we’ll face the future, be it what way.  
At even, and at morn, God will befriend us,  
And oh, most surely on each new year’s day!**

Sadly, Dietrich and Maria never did get married. Just as the war was ending, Bonhoeffer was executed in a concentration camp by the Nazis. Maria was heartbroken, but Bonhoeffer’s writings lived on.

Years later in America, Joseph Bayly was a Christian leader and author who also suffered tragic losses.

His 5 year old died of leukemia.

His 18 day-old baby died.

His 18 year-old son who had just become engaged, died in a tragic sledding accident.

The accumulated grief of these losses threatened to overwhelm Joseph. He quit writing; he had nothing left to say. Then the grieving fiancée of Joseph’s son found Bonhoeffer’s poem “*New Year 1945.*” It ministered to her so much that she gave it to Joseph Bayly. It impacted him and his family very deeply. In fact, it gave them so much hope that Joseph started writing again. One of the books he wrote was called *Heaven*. He wrote about heaven because his sons had gone there ahead of him. And in his book, he included parts of Bonhoeffer’s poem “*New Year 1945.*”

Think about how contagious the hope of God is -- Bonhoeffer sitting in a prison cell wrote a poem to give hope to his fiancée, having no idea that it would give hope to a man in another nation and another time so deeply that he included it in one of his books. That's the power of rekindled hope. But that's not the end of the story.

About 12 years later, Joseph Bayly got a letter from a pastor friend in Boston. The pastor was a chaplain in a hospital, where he visited those who were dying of cancer. As he was making his rounds, he came across a woman who was in the final stages of her cancer. He visited her several times and became friends with her. The pastor had been so deeply touched by Bayly's book "Heaven" and the hope that it described that he purchased the book for her and gave it to her. The woman stayed up at nights reading it. She told the pastor that the book had resurrected her hope and brought her great comfort. It was the last thing that she read before she died. That woman's name was... Maria – Bonhoeffer's fiancée.

She had moved to America after war. She had established a successful career, but she also encountered more pain and had been divorced twice. When she was just 53 years old and dying of cancer, a pastor walked into her room and gave her a book about heaven. And in this book, she read the words that Bonhoeffer once wrote to her to encourage her to have hope, and those words prepared her to step into eternity.<sup>1</sup>

Hope is contagious. May we spread it widely.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://spoorofthestarfish.blogspot.com/2006/02/know-dietrich-meet-maria.html>