

When we start a new year it is always a good time to take an inventory of how the last year has been and usually it brings an expectant hope of what the new year will bring. We saw this especially as we turned the calendar from 2020 to 2021. Many people said how excited they would be to see 2020 end. It was a rough year and there was a hope that 2021 would be different. It wasn't. But I have noticed this year a change.

I have not heard many people mention their hope for 2022. You haven't heard comments of how people want this year to end, even though it has been difficult in its own right and that 2022 will be better.

This led me to look into the concept of **hope**. I definitely saw more of it as 2020 ended than I do as 2021 is ending. Hope is such a powerful thing and yet it is ambiguous. So first I wanted to see how the world defined hope.

American Psychological Association Defines hope:

The **expectation** that one will have positive experiences or that a potentially threatening or negative situation will not materialize or will ultimately result in a favorable state of affairs. Hope has been characterized in the psychological literature in various ways, including as a **character strength**; an **emotion**; a component of **motivation** that is critical to goal attainment; a **mechanism** that facilitates **coping** with loss, illness, and other significant stresses; or an integrated combination of these features.

And yet this worldly definition gives no specifics. The World had a hope that one year would be better than the next and because that didn't happen it is almost collectively depressed. There had been a hope that didn't materialize.

I did a word study for hope in scripture and worked through 100's of verses describing hope. And some themes developed. First was that there is false hope.

Psalms 33:16-17 ESV

(16) The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

(17) **The war horse is a false hope for salvation**, and by its great might it cannot rescue.

It is possible to hope in something that is not true or real. Hope is very similar to trust, or faith. None of them have any value in and of themselves.

There is no point to have hope by itself, trust by itself, or faith by itself. All three need an object. What is the hope based on? What will

accomplish this goal? In this verse it is military might. Scripture does not mince words that is a false hope.

What were people looking to last year as a hope that 2021 would be better? What answers, what was the object?

Scripture has so much to say as to who the object of our hope is:

Romans 15:13 ESV

(13) May **the God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit **you may abound in hope.**

Our God is a God of hope who wants us as believers to abound in it.

1 Timothy 1:1 ESV

(1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of **Christ Jesus our hope,**

Put simply Jesus is our hope. He is the one that secured everything needed for us to have a hope in eternity, and for this life know. He, Jesus Christ is our Hope. He enables us to have:

Galatians 5:5 ESV

(5) For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the **hope of righteousness.**

Our hope is in being with Jesus, having a perfect righteousness. Hoping for this event is actually temporary...

1 Corinthians 13:12-13 ESV

(12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

(13) **So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

Love continues on into eternity. Hope is based on a future expectation. In heaven our hope will be fulfilled. We won't be hoping because we will be with Christ.

Romans 8:22-31 ESV

(23) And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as **we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

(24) For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

(25) But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

We are eagerly waiting for our redemption. When we will be with Christ. That is the hope of our salvation, to be in relationship with Him. We don't hope for what we see. We hope for what is unseen. The word study on hope showed this principal.

There were many verses about hope in the OT, very few in the gospels, tons in the New Testament Letters, very few in revelation.

This is why hope is so important for us today. **We are living in the in-between.** Jesus has come the first time and we are eagerly awaiting, and hoping for the second return of Christ. Hope should be a major focus for us. Because our hope is in Him.

Having hope helps us be able to process this life

Romans 5:1-5 ESV

(1) Therefore, since we have been **justified by faith**, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) Through Him we have also obtained access **by faith into this grace** in which we stand, and we rejoice **in hope of the glory of God**.

(3) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces **endurance**,

(4) and endurance produces **character**, and character produces **hope**,

(5) **and hope does not put us to shame**, because God's **love** has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Suffering produces →

Endurance/ Perseverance

ὑπομονή, the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, *patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance*

Which Produces → Character

- a testing process, *test, ordeal* (this term was used of testing metals for purity and genuineness)

2. the experience of going through a test with special ref. to the result, *standing a test, character*

Which Produces → Hope

It gets our eyes up and onto Him. This is not a false hope, it does not put us to shame.

Romans 5:5 NLT

(5) And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

This pattern is repeated throughout scripture. It encourages us that we are able to endure and persevere through the suffering in this life because of the hope that is awaiting us.

This leads me to one thing I have noticed in this church over the past year. A renewed focus and longing for Christ return. So many conversations seem to end with this kind of longing.

This is biblical and healthy if we view it correctly.

As I was studying this concept of hope I stumbled on a study. It was done by nonbelievers about nonbelievers so it gives us insight into our human nature. They compared two groups of people. The first group had to have a surgery that would lead to life with a permanent disability. They would have this disability for the rest of their life. The second group of people were going to have this same disability but only for 6 months and then they could have a surgery to fix it.

After 6 months, they evaluated the happiness of each group, and found the group with the permanent disability, the group with no hope of having it changed were happier, then the group who had hope it would be fixed. The doctor that organized the study had this to say about the results of why hope lead to less happiness:

“It can cause people to put their lives on hold. Instead of moving on and trying to make the best of circumstances, you can think, ‘my circumstances are going to change eventually - no point in dealing with these circumstances’,” Ubel said.

This study challenged me. Was this finding Biblical?

Proverbs 13:12 ESV

(12) Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

deferred

-to draw, drag, drawn out, be postponed, be deferred

When hope is not realized and drawn out is makes out heart Sick. This group of people that were hoping for the reversal surgery, there hope

was being deferred. It was being drawn out, and their hearts were sick at the end of it.

Is this what we do when we look forward to the Hope we have in Christ? Could that hope make this life more miserable?

NOT AT ALL!

There is a giant core difference. This life has purpose right now!

The group that was awaiting the reversal surgery had no purpose in their waiting. They had to endure, and just wait it out. No reason to figure out how to do life with this disability when it will be gone soon. This kind of waiting without purpose is a differed hope. **Our waiting is with purpose.** Our suffering we endure has a great purpose. Remember what suffering produced first.

Romans 5:4 ESV

(4) and endurance produces **character**, and character produces hope,

A tested value. Scripture does not teach us to aimlessly live this life, just waiting to be with Christ. **It teaches us to live this life with a real purpose, and conviction.** To have a hope of the future that motivates the now. A hope that makes this life matter more than ever.

Jeremiah 29:1 ESV

(1) These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet **sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles**, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, **whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.**

Jeremiah 29:4-7 ESV

(4) “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

(5) **Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.**

(6) Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.

(7) **But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**

I guarantee you this is not the answer they expected to hear. God tells them. Settle in. You are staying there for a while.

Notice they are given jobs, goals, a purpose.

- Build houses
- Plant gardens
- seek the welfare of the city
- pray to the LORD on its behalf

There is a giant difference between waiting passively and waiting actively.

Jeremiah 29:8-10 ESV

(8) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: **Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,**

(9) **for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name;** I did not send them, declares the LORD.

(10) “For thus says the LORD: **When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you,** and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

You have false teacher who are lying to you and saying your time is going to be short, and you are not staying. Don't listen to them! You will be there 70 years.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 ESV

(11) **For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.**

(12) Then you will call upon me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you.

(13) You will seek Me and find me, when you seek Me with all your heart.

God had plans for them. They involved staying in the exile. This was a giant lesson. They could glorify God in the exile they could live for God in Babylon. Their sin had put them into exile and yet there still was purpose to living for God in the exile. This would help them to grow closer to God than they ever have been before.

Jeremiah 31:16-17 ESV

(16) Thus says the LORD: “**Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work,** declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy.

(17) **There is hope for your future,** declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.

There is a reward to growing closer to God and walking in relationship with Him. Their life in the exile had a real purpose. They were not waiting ideally.

Notice, there hope for a future was not to go back, their children would but they wouldn't.

We have to live with a purpose. We cannot settle into a deferred hope and think this life does not matter right now. Scripture has much to say about what this purpose looks like.

1 Peter 2:11 ESV

(11) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to **abstain from the passions of the flesh**, which wage war against your soul.

1 John 3:2-5 ESV

(2) Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; **but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.**

(3) **And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.**

(4) Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

(5) You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

We must not grow complacent with sin. We cannot let the World influence us with sinful thinking, and actions. The longer we are in exile the more we can start to think like the World. We are called to fight against this.

Ephesians 5:15-17 ESV

(15) Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

(16) **making the best use of the time**, because the days are evil.

(17) Therefore do not be foolish, **but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

Redeem the time. Our time in exile is limited. We don't have a time period put on it. WE need to have a focus to ask God how to take each and every situation and use it for His glory. To seek out God's will in each situation.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 ESV

(3) **For this is the will of God, your sanctification:** that you abstain from sexual immorality;

God wants our sanctification. To grow closer in relationship with Him. This means leaving sin behind and yet it means so much more.

Ephesians 2:10 ESV

(10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, **which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

These good works laid out for us, look so different than we expect. It looks like a deepening and vibrant walk with Christ. The closer you are in relationship with Him the ministry God has called you to will flow out of that. Want to know what your ministry is? Grow closer to Him.

Titus 2:11-15 ESV

- (11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,
- (12) training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, **and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,**
- (13) **waiting for our blessed hope,** the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
- (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession **who are zealous for good works.**
- (15) Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

Lamentations 3:16-33 ESV

- (16) He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes;
- (17) my soul is bereft of peace; **I have forgotten what happiness is;**
- (18) so I say, **“My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD.”**
- (19) Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!
- (20) My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.
- (21) **But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:**
- (22) **The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;**
- (23) **they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**
- (24) “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”
- (25) **The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.**
- (26) **It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.**