

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

This will be the shortest Easter sermon you will ever hear from me. But let me be clear, that is not the definition of Christian hope.

Christian hope is only possible because of Jesus (pause) His sinless life, His completed work on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven. Sitting in your homes, that may sound exceptionally strange given the fact that we are facing the first pandemic in over 100 years. I say to that, we as Christians can experience Christian hope more than ever.

First of all, let me define Christian hope. Hope is an eager expectation for what God has guaranteed. Hope is a deep inner confidence in God that assures you that no matter what this world and all its problems throw at you, you will overcome by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Luther said true Christian hope means we need never sink into the pit of despair. No one who learns to hope in a Biblical way will ever be overcome by disappointment but will be filled with patience, encouragement, and enthusiasm. Hope causes us as believers to look forward to the future with joy because the resurrection power of Jesus is always with us and will never let go of us; underneath are the ever-lasting arms. Disappointment, self-pity, feeling sorry for one's self means we are looking too much at our own circumstances and not seeing them as God's appointments to thrive and be the overcomer Christ calls us to be. God provides the strength by giving us hope to never give up but once we put our hands to the plow, to keep going forward and never look back. Christian hope means God knows exactly what He is doing in your life and His work inside of you is never done. To lose hope means we doubt the sufficiency of God's grace and we then even live like practical atheists discounting all of who God is. Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Those phrases in and of themselves are the reason we hope, an eager joyful expectation for what God has guaranteed.

I read this testimony from one of our nation's governors. *"In times of crisis and doubt, we are pushed to examine our beliefs, and perhaps even to steady ourselves in those beliefs," he wrote, acknowledging that a largely unknown pandemic could shake a person's faith. Thirty-three years earlier his parents were killed when a drunk driver hit them causing him to doubt whether or not he believed in God at all. Now he says with great confidence, "No, this is me, knowing with dead-solid certainty that we are graced by the most powerful being to ever exist in the universe, who cares for us, who cares for our families, who cares about what we do and how we live our lives and the footprints we mean to leave behind. He does. Absolutely, He does."* (Found on ChristianPost.Com – testimony of Governor John Kasich. Monday April 6, 2020).

Hope knows with dead solid certainty that whatever you are facing today, God has exactly what you need and will help you overcome completely by His power and grace. Some of you may be dealing with aging parents and you have grown tired. No matter what you do it is never enough. This is where Christian hope can make all the difference in the world. God is the reason your parents are still living. God is working through them to change you, to mold you, to form and fashion you more into the image of Jesus. Hope knows this time will not last forever. In the meantime, the resurrection power of Jesus is within you every day to serve them until their last day. And when it is more than you can do, it is good to ask for help from others, including hiring caregivers. Caregivers outside of the family can be angels sent from God. Taking care of elderly parents can be too much. Christian hope knows God does not want you constantly stressed and fatigued. I see caregivers of the elderly as a means of God's grace restoring you in wonderful ways.

We all have hard issues we are facing. Some emotional, some financial, some relational, and more. This is why Easter Sunday can be one of the most significant days of our lives. God is all powerful. His victory over death means a believer never dies. His victory over Satan means Satan cannot conquer any Christian. Christ's victory over sin means sin no longer has to

dominate our lives and we can have increasing victory over sin as we grow in the Christian faith. Jesus conquered hell so hell will never touch us. All of this is assured to every Christian and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means this is absolute truth that never changes for Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever more. To live with this solid assurance and certainty is what we as Christians are all about.

It is a privilege to be a pastor and have people open their lives to you and express some of their deepest thoughts and troubling times. Believing in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ does not keep troubles away from us. Christian hope moves us to rejoice in the Lord always. **1 Peter 1:6-7(NLT)** ⁶So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. ⁷These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold - though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

James 1:2-4(NLT) ²Dear brothers and sisters,³ when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. **Romans 5:3-5(NLT)** ³We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵And 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.

Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsy were imprisoned at Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp which Corrie called the closest place to hell on earth. It was there she learned one of the greatest truths of living with Christian hope. "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." It was that hope that Betsy clung to until she breathed her last

breath in the prison hospital and Jesus lifted her up into heaven. It was that hope that Corrie clung to for the rest of her life travelling the entire world, preaching and teaching the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ the only source of hope. There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still. No matter how low you get, the resurrection power of Christ will go lower still and raise you anew. This is what Christian hope is all about, eagerly awaiting with joy what God has guaranteed. I end with Paul's words, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Amen and Amen.