

INTRODUCTION

This is the first of a five-part series entitled, "Is There Any HOPE for Me?" This message will answer the question, "Is there hope for my broken heart?" The subsequent messages will answer the questions, "Is there hope for me when I've messed up? Is there HOPE for me when I'm afraid? Is there HOPE for me when I feel like quitting? Is there hope for my fractured family?"

Hope is the ability to stand in the present and look into the future with confidence. People not only want to know what the future holds for their life, but what will happen to them after they die.

I read a funny story about a man from Chicago who was traveling to Florida for a vacation. His wife was delayed and was going to join him the next day. When he arrived at his hotel, he wanted to send her an email from the lobby computer, but he couldn't recall her email address from memory. He typed in what he thought was her email address, but unfortunately he got one letter wrong. Instead of the email going to his wife, it went to an elderly preacher's wife, whose husband had died a few days earlier. When the preacher's wife checked her email, she found the message from the guy in Florida. When she read it, she screamed and then fainted. It said:

Dear Wife,
Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.
Your loving husband
P.S. – It sure is hot down here!

If you really could get a message from someone who has already died, you'd probably pay close attention to it. Actually, we *do* have a message from the only man who died and then came back from the dead, never to die again. His name is Jesus, and you can read about Him in Luke 24.

On the very first Easter, there were two people walking back from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus, seven miles away. Cleopas was one of the people, but the other one is never named. It might have been Mrs. Cleopas, or another family member or friend. If you had been following them, you'd have noticed their heads were hanging low and their feet were dragging. They were weighed down with a load of discouragement and disappointment. These two had been followers of Jesus Christ, and three days earlier they had seen their hopes and dreams nailed to a cross. Their hearts were broken.

As they were walking along, a stranger joined them. They didn't recognize Him, but the stranger was Jesus, fresh from His resurrection. They had watched Him die, and nobody expects to see dead men walking. The stranger asked them what they were discussing. We'll pick up their answer in Luke 24:19,

“‘About Jesus of Nazareth’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but WE HAD HOPED that he was the one was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but

didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.'" (Luke 24:19-24)

To fast forward a little, at that point, Jesus started telling them about why the Messiah *had* to die. Then, as they walked, Jesus talked them about how every book in the Old Testament predicted the ministry of death of the Messiah. When they reached their home in Emmaus, the two disciples invited their guest to join them for supper. When Jesus took the bread and said the blessing they suddenly recognized Him—and "poof" Jesus vanished. Let's pick up with Luke 24:32.

"They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread." (Luke 24:32-35)

Because of their Easter encounter with Jesus, these two people were never again the same. If you so desire, you, too, can have an Easter encounter with Jesus. In this message I want to share two brief observations and one important application:

1. LIFE IS FULL OF HEART-BREAKING EXPERIENCES

At the beginning of that first Easter, the two disciples were full of despair. It says in verse 17, "They stood still, their faces downcast." Their hopes and dreams had been crushed.

Maybe you're suffering from a broken heart as well.

A broken heart is not a rare experience—it's all too commonplace. A few years ago, Jimmy Ruffin and the Temptations recorded a song that asked a question: "What becomes of the Broken Hearted?" He sang, "As I walk this land with broken dreams / I have visions of many things/ Love's happiness is just an illusion / Filled with sadness and confusion/ What becomes of the broken hearted / Who had love that's now departed? / I know I've got to find some kind of peace of mind/ maybe..."

The lists of things that can cause your heart to break is much longer than we have time to discuss. A bad romance or marriage can break your heart. The death of someone you love can break your heart. Not making the team, or the cheerleading squad, or not getting that promotion can break your heart. From the cradle to the grave, pain and despair come to us like waves of the ocean. If you're between a wave right now, be thankful! But chances are another wave is on the way—that's life. Nobody is immune from the pain of a broken heart. The Bible says nobody is immune from trouble. The Psalmist observed, "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10)

I heard about a newspaper in Nashville that was going to do a series of articles on people who were suffering from a broken heart. They wrote to pastors asking them to consider submitting the names of people they knew who had suffered a broken heart. One perceptive pastor sent the newspaper the Nashville telephone directory. He was close to being correct!

2. A BROKEN HEART CAN DESTROY YOUR HOPE

These two disciples in Luke 24 knew what it was to have broken hearts and broken hopes. Listen to their words again in verse 21: "We had hoped that he was the one..." Have you ever come to a place in your life when things didn't turn out the way you wanted them to and you had to say, "I HAD hoped?"

Losing hope can make you sick. The Bible says in Proverbs 13:12, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is the tree of life." Have you lost hope? Maybe you're single, maybe you've thought, "I had hoped to be married." Or if you're divorced maybe you've thought, "I had hoped to stay married." You may be a student who has thought, "I had hoped that my parents wouldn't split up." Or maybe you're a grieving widow who thinks, "I had hoped we would grow old together." You're not the only one who's said, "I had hoped..."

I recall sitting in the hospital with my dad who was dying of cancer. It had metastasized into his lungs and brain, and it was obvious to us that barring a miracle he was going to die. He was in his mid 50s—and I was in my late 20s. My dad worked hard all of his life. We didn't have a lot of what you'd call real vacations. Our vacations consisted of weekend visits to relatives, and a week during the summer to visit more relatives.

As the two of us were in his hospital room, I could tell he wanted to tell me something more important than just small talk, and it was tough for him to be in a situation where he couldn't work. I can recall him saying to me, "Son, I HAD HOPED (there are the words) I had hoped that when I retired that your mother and I would do some traveling. I realize now that I've made a mistake. Don't you make the same mistake with your family. Don't wait until you retire to make some memories." Within a month, he was dead.

Hopelessness is when you're afraid that "things won't work out." Sometimes you feel that way, but "Hope is the feeling that the feeling you have won't last forever!"

Everyone is in search of hope. At the end of WWII, a submarine was limping back to dock at Newport News, Virginia. As it approached the dock, something went wrong with the ballast system and it began to sink in the harbor. When it came to rest on the bottom of the harbor, divers immediately began a rescue operation. As the divers approached they could hear a tapping on the hull. A crew member inside the sub was tapping in Morse code these words: IS THERE ANY HOPE? That's what millions of people are looking for today—hope.

And that leads us perfectly into the application point of this message:

3. JESUS CAN RESTORE YOUR H.O.P.E.

At the beginning of Easter, the two disciples were discouraged because their hopes and dreams had been crushed. But when they encountered the risen Christ, their hope was restored. They observed in verse 32: "Were not our hearts burning within us as he talked with us on the road?" Their broken hearts were replaced with hearts that were burning with hope and excitement. And Jesus can restore your hope, as well.

Hope is a valuable commodity. In 1997, there was a movie starring Kevin Costner called "The Postman." Hollywood movie critics ridiculed it as one of the worst movies ever produced. So, that's probably why I liked it. I was watching it on DVD not long ago, and I had already been thinking a lot about HOPE as I was preparing this series. As I watched it, I realized the movie is all about the value and power of hope. It was set in the future after a war devastated America. Kevin Costner is fleeing from the evil General Valentine when he hides out in an old wrecked Postal truck. He borrows the uniform from the skeleton, and wanders into an isolated town claiming to be a Postman for the Reformed United States Government. He claims there's a new president, Richard Starkey, (for you Trivia nuts, that's Ringo Starr's real name) living at the new U.S. Capital in Minneapolis. The Postman told them, "The President wants you to know that 'stuff is getting better.' Of course, he's just trying to deceive them into feeding him. But in the process of his deception, he starts giving people hope. He gives hope to a blind woman when she received a letter from her sister. He gave hope to a young man named Ford Lincoln Mercury and inspired him to enlist a larger group of Postmen. In the end, the Postman ends up leading the people into a rebellion against General Valentine.

There's a scene in the movie where Abby, played by Olivia Williams, is talking about hope. She says, "You have a gift Postman. I saw it back in Pineview. You've given us all back what we've forgotten. You made Mrs. March feel like she could see again. You made Ford feel like he was part of the world. You give out hope like it was candy in your pocket."

When I heard that line, I didn't think about Kevin Costner or some apocalyptic movie. I thought about the power of hope. Hope is what gives people the reason to go on even when their hearts are broken. I thought, "That's exactly what Jesus does. He gives out hope to everyone who encounters Him." Jesus claimed that He has power to heal a broken heart. He said, "He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted." (Luke 4:18 NKJV) Has your heart been broken? Has there been such pain and disappointment that you've wondered, "What's the use?" Jesus is willing and able to heal your broken heart, but you've got to be willing to give him all the pieces.

Several years ago, God gave me a good acrostic for HOPE. I met a student in China whose English name is Hope. She asked me for a Bible and in the process of studying the Bible she has become a tremendous believer who has a heart to lead her family and friends to Christ. When I first met her and learned her name, I asked her if she knew the meaning of the word "hope," she shook her head. I'd never heard or read it before, so I guess God gave it to me. I said, "Hope stands for Having Only Positive Expectations." She smiled and repeated it. As I thought about it, I said, "Thank you, Lord. That's what HOPE really is—Having Only Positive Expectations."

If you need hope, you can do three things these two disciples in Luke 24 did.

1. There is HOPE if you will walk with Him

As these two disciples walked along, their sadness was turned to joy, and their despair was replaced with hope. In the Bible the word "walk with" speaks of a close relationship.

Every day we are faced with temptations. There is a voice of temptation suggesting we walk down the wrong pathway. But the Bible says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16) In other words, when you're walking with God, He will direct you in the right pathway. The Bible says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you say, "this is the way, walk in it." (Isaiah 30:21)

Walking with Jesus means you acknowledge Jesus as your constant companion. But sadly, many people who claim to be a Christian regard Jesus much the same way they treat their spare tire in the truck. Do you think about the Lord only when you have a personal "blow out?" Like a spare tire, some people realize Jesus is always there, but they never really acknowledge Him until they have some kind of crisis. If you want to have HOPE, you've got to walk with Him daily.

2. There is HOPE if you will listen to Him

Not only did the two disciples on the road to Emmaus walk with Jesus, they listened to what He had to say. He started talking about Genesis and traced His presence through every section of the Old Testament. Their hope was gone until they heard what He had to say.

The Lord is trying to talk to you—are you hearing His voice? That's why we're having the prayer conference April 22-23 with Henry Blackaby called "Hearing God's Voice." The Lord is speaking, are you listening?

God's original intent was to create people with whom He could have a personal, loving relationship. The Bible says He would walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Sin destroyed that relationship, and salvation is having that relationship restored. Through Jesus Christ, it's possible to know God and to walk and talk with Him.

One of my favorite hymns is "In the Garden" written by Austin Miles. It speaks of walking and talking with the Lord. You can have exactly the kind of relationship with God this song describes: He speaks, and the sound of his name; is so sweet the birds hush their singing. And the melody that he brings to me, within my heart is ringing. And he walks with me and he talks with me; and he tells me I am his own; and the joy we share as we tarry there; none other has ever known.

3. There is HOPE if you will see Him for who He really is

They two disciples walked with Jesus, they listened to Jesus, but it wasn't until He broke bread and blessed it that their eyes were fully opened. When they recognized Jesus for who He really was, their hopes were fully restored. They thought He was dead—and suddenly, they realized He was alive. They were so excited they got up and ran those seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples.

Do you recognize Jesus? How would you answer this question: Who is Jesus? If your answer is that He was a religious teacher who lived and died 2,000 years ago, you wouldn't be wrong, but you wouldn't be completely correct either. He is so much more than the founder of a religion. There are many religions on this planet. You can visit the tombs where the remains of all the religious leaders are buried. But the single feature that makes Jesus unique is that He is alive today. If you don't see Him as living today—you don't have any basis for hope.

Easter is the most hope-full day of the year, because the Bible says it is the resurrection of Jesus that is the basis for our HOPE. "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (I Peter 1:3)

The crucifixion of Jesus was not a rare event. Thousands of criminals were crucified on a Roman Cross. It is the resurrection of Jesus that stands alone in history as unique. Through it we have hope.

CONCLUSION

On the night of March 12, 2005, Ashley Smith experienced every woman's worst nightmare. As she was entering her apartment at 2 a.m., escaped prisoner Brian Nichols came up behind her and stuck a gun in her ribs. For seven hours she was the hostage of a man who allegedly gunned down several people in the past few hours. Brian Nichols tied her up and told her he was probably going to have to kill her too.

Over the next few hours, a miracle occurred. Ashley told her captor she had a five-year-old daughter and that her husband had been killed. If she died, her little girl wouldn't have a mommy or a daddy. When she started talking about God to her captor, he released her, but kept the guns within reach. Then she asked him if she could read something. He said, "Go ahead." She got her Bible and Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. She had been reading a section of the book each day, seeking to draw closer to God. Over the next few hours they talked about God and the Bible.

The next morning, he allowed her to leave to pick up her daughter from an AWANA event at a local Baptist Church. She called 911 and when police surrounded her apartment, Brian Nichols surrendered without any resistance.

I admire Ashley Smith. She's not what you'd call a Proverbs 31 woman. She doesn't teach BSF, or lead a women's prayer group. Instead she's a girl who has gone through years of heart breaking failures and disappointments. She's been through drug and alcohol rehab, she had to give up custody of her daughter. She was leaving her apartment that night to go buy cigarettes. She's not a person who has it all together—She's in the process of getting it all together. That's what hope is. Even when life is bad, you're still looking to God and Having Only Positive Expectations. For everyone who is struggled to find hope, Ashley Smith serves as a great source of encouragement. Her experience should give all of us hope. That's what she talked to Brian Nichols about—HOPE.

In recounting those seven hours, Ashley said, "He needed hope for his life...He said, 'Look at

me. Look at my eyes. I'm already dead.' And I said, 'You are not dead. You are standing right in front of me...After I started to read to him, he saw my faith and what I really believed in. I told him I was a child of God and that I wanted to do God's will. I guess he began to want to...I believe God brought him to my door so he wouldn't hurt anyone else.'" (NY Daily News, Corky Siemaszko, March 20, 2005)

I believe Ashley Smith is alive and Brian Nichols is behind bars because she has begun to understand that Jesus Christ is the only source of hope for us. Do you possess that kind of hope?

Hope is more than blind optimism. Hope is better than bland pessimism. An optimist sees the glass as half full. A pessimist sees the glass as half empty. But a person with hope sees the glass is firmly held in the hand of God." You don't have to worry about what the future holds if you know who holds your future.

The message of Easter is a message of HOPE to the broken hearted. The God who holds the future is the God who can heal your broken heart. As Gloria Gaither wrote, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow (that's HOPE); Because He lives, all fear is gone (that's HOPE); Because I know who holds my future; and life is worth the living, just because He lives"—that's HOPE!

OUTLINE

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2. A BROKEN HEART CAN DESTROY YOUR HOPE

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is the tree of life." *Proverbs 13:12*

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Jesus said, "He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted." *Luke 4:18 NKJV*

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2. Listen to Him
3. See Him for who He really is



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes