

Blessed hope for the hurting

April 21, 2019

The American agnostic lecturer Robert G. Ingersoll called "Hope is the only universal liar who never loses his reputation for veracity." But the late Norman Cousins, former editor of *The Saturday Review*, who miraculously survived an almost incurable illness and a severe heart attack, adamantly disagrees with Ingersoll. He declared, "The human body experiences a powerful gravitational pull in the direction of hope. That's why the patient's hopes are the physician's secret weapon. They are the hidden ingredients in any prescription." In his work with patients at the UCLA School of Medicine, Cousins proved the power of hope to change people's lives.

Let me give you a tragic example of the people who lost hope. You may remember the Sago Mine Disaster in West Virginia that happened January 6, 2006. Martin Toler Jr. huddled with 11 fellow miners trying to shelter from the poisonous air in one of the farthest reaches of the Sago Mine, he took an insurance form and a pencil from his pocket.

In faint sentences of farewell and religious conviction, he let his family know that death, as it approached, came gently. "Tell all – I see them on the other side," Toler, a 51-year-old mine foreman, wrote. Nearby were the words, "It wasn't bad, I just went to sleep." And at the bottom, "I love you." I don't know whether Martin Toler was saved or not. But when he wrote this note, he lost hope physically and emotionally.

I believe that our Lord Jesus has the Blessed Hope for all the hurting if you only open your heart to listen to Him this morning.

A. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO LONELINESS

Some of you may not show your loneliness to others, but if the truth be known, it holds you like the vicelike grip. The despair of loneliness has settled down upon your soul, and at this very moment you are asking the question: "Is life worth living?"

For many people, life has ceased to be worth living. To all of you I have good news. God did not create you to be a defeated, discouraged, frustrated, wandering soul, seeking in vain for peace of heart and peace of mind. He has bigger plans for you. He has a greater life for you. The answer to your problem – however great it is – is as near as your Bible, as simple as first-grade arithmetic and as real as your heart-beat.

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Upon the authority of God's Word, I declare to you that Christ is the answer to every baffling perplexity that plagues mankind. In Him is found the cure for care, a balm for bereavement, a healing for our hurts, and a sufficiency for our insufficiency.

Many of you are living lives of unbearable loneliness. You can be lonely in the midst of the crowd, or even while you are married. The world to you is shut off, and you are shut out. Social barriers have prevented you from doing what you wish to do. Personality barriers are not helping and hinder you. You live in a world of utter solitude. Or perhaps your companion of many years has suddenly been taken away, or

left you for someone else, and you are left alone in an empty house. Loneliness is no respecter of persons. It invades the palace as well as the shack.

Many turn to alcohol, drugs, or jump into the relationship without true love because of loneliness. Others lose their sanity because of loneliness. Many even commit suicide because of the despair of loneliness.

But thousands have found Christ to be the answer for their loneliness.

Matthew 28:20b lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

You may remember Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, the 3 friends of the prophet Daniel in the OT. In the Book of Daniel chapter 3, they were told to bow down to the image of gold by king Nebuchadnezzar. But they refused, because they would not bow down to an idol, even if it cost them their lives. King Nebuchadnezzar was the kind of guy who doesn't do with the answer "No." The king was hopping mad and had them thrown into the fiery furnace. But when the king looked inside of the furnace, he realized that the Hebrew children were not alone in the furnace. There was One with them like the Son of God.

Moses wasn't alone in the Midian Desert when God came to comfort him and call him to a ministry. Elijah wasn't alone in the cave when God came near and spoke in a still small voice. Paul and Silas were not alone in the Philippian jail when God came down and gave them a song at midnight.

Whoever you are, Christ can give you comfort and companionship. Whatever color, race, or creed, your heart yearnings are the same. The lonely, aching spot can be filled by Christ, if you will open your heart and let Him in.

B. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO SORROW

There are many of you who have turned to God, but you are still carrying your burdens, when God invites you by saying this:

1 Peter 5:7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

You who must go through the valley of the shadow of death; you who must say good-bye to those whom you have loved; you who suffer deprivation and misery; you who are unjustly persecuted for righteousness' sake, take heart, take courage. Christ is more than adequate for your sorrow.

The apostle Paul, who suffered as much as any person who ever lived, said:

2 Timothy 4:18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

Diseased, afflicted, scarred, bruised, and battered by persecution, he held no bitterness, but found in Christ a sufficiency for sorrow.

For those who are in Christ, listen to me carefully, please.

The problem with our heavy-hearted believers was not a lack of faith, but a lack of vision. Our problem is not so much that God doesn't give us what we hope for as it is that we don't know the right thing for which to hope.

Hope is not what we expect. It is what we would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a "pinch-me-I'm-dreaming" ending. It's Abraham adjusting his bifocals so he can see not his grandson, but his own son. It's Moses standing in the promised

land not with Aaron or Miriam at his side, but with Elijah and the transfigured Christ, the Son of the Living God. And it is the two Emmaus bound pilgrims reaching out to take a piece of bread only to see that the hands from which it is offered are pierced.

God gives hope to those who trust in Him in spite of the situations and circumstances they are in. We must take our eyes off what we see, but focus on the immortal and invisible and the only wise God and His unchanging Word. He never fails.

C. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO SUFFERING

Sickness, sorrow, and sin all contain the hissing deception of the serpent and are the result of the fall of man in the garden. Sickness is a byproduct of transgression of mankind. But that by no means indicates that Christians are never afflicted. The Bible says: *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous"* in Psalm 34:19.

Job was afflicted beyond what the majority of us could imagine. The apostle Paul had an infirmity to his death. Lazarus was sick and died. And godly people down across the centuries have been promised no immunity from disease and infirmity.

Many people have asked me, "Why do Christians suffer?" This is a favorite question of atheists and agnostics to challenge against the love of our God. I cannot tell you the exact reasons why good believers of Christ suffer and sick.

But I do know this: There are three reasons for Christian people being afflicted. They are either being disciplined, chastened, or molding process.

Proverbs 3:12 For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

From these Scriptures we learn that the chastening of affliction is a step in the process of our full and complete development. It is a love tap from our Heavenly Father to show us that we have wandered from the pathway of duty.

Affliction can also be a means of refining and of purification. Many people have come forth from the furnace of affliction more beautiful and more useful and more godly.

We sang a song, "It is well with my soul." It was written by Horatio Spafford who was a successful lawyer and businessman in Chicago with a lovely family – a wife, Anna, and five children. However, they were not strangers to tears and tragedy. Their young son died with pneumonia in 1871, and in that same year, much of their business was lost in the great Chicago fire. Yet, God in His mercy and kindness allowed the business to flourish once more.

On Nov. 21, 1873, the French ocean liner was crossing the Atlantic from the U.S. to Europe with 313 passengers, including Horatio's wife and their four daughters on board. He couldn't go with them due to his business and told his wife he would join them in Europe a few days later.

About four days into the crossing of the Atlantic, their ship collided with a powerful Scottish ship. Their ship sank beneath the cold and dark waters of the Atlantic, carrying with it 226 of the passengers including the four Spafford children. Anna survived and wired her husband a message which began, "Saved alone."

Another of the ship's survivors, pastor Weiss, later recalled Anna saying, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why."

Horatio booked passage on the next available ship and left to join his grieving wife. With the ship about four days out, the captain called Spafford to his cabin and told him they were over the place where his children went down.

Horatio Spafford wrote, "It Is Well With My Soul" while on this journey:
When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Throughout the generations, this song touched millions of people's hearts and gave hope, strength, and dependence in God's will, though we may not understand why.

Job, who was called upon to suffer as few men have suffered, said:
Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Affliction is the blast furnace in which believers are smelted. It is in the midst of adversity that their true worth is revealed. Your sickroom can become a spiritual weight room where your soul is exercised and developed.

D. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO DISCOURAGEMENT

This is a world of baffled hopes, broken dreams, and frustrated desires. But Christ can take discouragement and despondency out of your life. He can put a spring in your step and give you a thrill in your heart and a purpose in your mind. Optimism and cheerfulness are products of knowing Christ. The situation may not be changed, but your heart that faces the situation will be changed because of Christ.

1 Peter 1:8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory

E. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM OF SIN

The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Bible indicates that all the troubles of the world stem from the fact that men have broken the laws of God. There is a penalty for breaking God's law, and that penalty is eternal death and banishment from His presence. However, the Scripture says that in Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

And the Bible says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" in 1 John 1:9.

Is your conscience smitten today because of sin in your life? Have you had the uncomfortable feeling that you are not in tune with God? Has the Holy Spirit been convicting you of the fact that you have broken the laws of God and need a Savior?

Why not open your heart's door and let Christ come into your life? The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The invitation from Jesus has been given. It is up to you to take that invitation of eternal life. Everybody close your eyes and bow your head, please.

If you want to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord and follow Him to have eternal life in Christ Jesus, raise your hand, please. Raise your hands high so that I can see you and make eye contact with me.

Including those people, I want all of you to repeat this prayer after me:

“Lord, I know that I am a sinner, and I am sorry for my sins. I know that my sins have separated me from you. I repent of my sins and I turn to You by faith right now. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son and God Himself. I believe that He died on the cross for my sins and You raised Him to life. I now want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as my Lord from this day forward. Please come into my heart and fill me with your Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”