

Peace and Hope

Forrest C. Gilmore*

Good morning everyone! Pastor Gary is preaching at Buffalo Baptist this morning, and I am honored to be able to share with you today from the pulpit. But, before I begin, let us take a moment to pray.....

In the late 19th century, Horatio Spafford, a prosperous lawyer and Presbyterian church elder and his wife, Anna, were living in Chicago. In 1870, the Spaffords' only son was killed by scarlet fever at the age of four, leaving them with their four young daughters. That year, the Great Fire erupted in Chicago, devastating the city. In November 1873, Anna and the four girls set sail for Europe aboard the S.S. Ville du Havre with a group of friends. Horatio stayed behind, detained by business. On November 21, the oceanliner was rammed by a British vessel and sank within minutes. Anna was rescued, but all the children drowned. Horatio received the tragic news in a telegram from Anna that read: "Saved alone. What shall I do?" Horatio immediately left for England to bring his wife home.

Horatio Spafford, upon hearing the news, left for England to join his wife. As the ship he was on passed the place where his daughters perished, the captain called him to the bridge. "A careful reckoning has been made", he said, "and I believe we are now passing the place where the de Havre was wrecked. The water is three miles deep." That night, in his cabin, Horatio penned the lyrics to one of the most famous hymns of all time.

The first verse reads,

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, its is well, with my soul.

It is well, Horatio G. Spafford penned. It is well even though the grief is so great. The Spaffords went on to have two daughters afterward and founded a ministry in Jerusalem, where they devoted the rest of their lives in service to the poor. The ministry did many good works and lasted long after their deaths.

It is well with my soul.

Can you say that this morning? It is well with your soul?

Listen to Lamentations 3:22-24 (NASB)

The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

God's lovingkindness is a characteristic of God that is mentioned over 200 times in Scripture. The Hebrew word is *chesed*.

It is translated several ways -most frequently, lovingkindness and Kindness, but also goodness, faithfulness, devotion, loyalty, and merciful. The prophet Jeremiah wrote during the time when Israel was in Babylonian captivity. The sacred temple lay in ruins, yet he said, "I have hope in Him."

Psalm 25:4-6 (NASB)

Remember, O LORD, Your compassion and Your lovingkindnesses, For they have been from of old.

Do you have this hope this morning?

What kind of hope is this? Let me tell another story:

The day is a cold January 25th. Two gale force storms have already shattered the main mast of the ship. In the third month at sea, a third terrifying storm, a "nor'easter," caused the Englishman, John Wesley, to fear for his life—so much so, that he writes, "It was as if the great deep had already swallowed us up." Yet, on the same ship during the same storm, a group of German Christians appear completely calm as they quote the Psalms. According to young Wesley, their lack of fear unsettled him more than the storm itself!

How can they be calm when their ship faces catastrophe? How can they be at peace when their lives are in peril? What makes their hope strong and his so weak? All on the same battered ship... all weary from the same raging storm... all tossed by the same crashing waves—yet while one man feels frantic, the others keep calm. Why? Simply put: Their lives were anchored in Christ, and they knew their anchor would hold.

These Mennonites, who clearly had a peace that passes all understanding, displayed their hope as though they were speaking directly to the Lord, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). Not, **IF** I am afraid, but "**When** I am afraid, I will trust in you."

What an anchor is to a ship, hope is to the soul. They both stabilize whatever needs to be held steady amidst the storms in life. Every Christian has been given a secure anchor in the person of Christ... for the Bible says about Jesus...

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." (Hebrews 6:19)

Hope identified as Christian hope is an optimistic assurance that something will be fulfilled. This hope is a guaranteed hope not subject to change, but rather anchored in our unchangeable Savior and Lord.

Hope in the New Testament is conveyed by the Greek word *elpis*, which means a "favorable and confident expectation" relating to the future.

This word is used in Romans 5:3-5 (NASB)

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Thus, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are the source of a favorable and confident expectation about our future. Do you have this hope in your heart this morning?

The anchor of hope and the rope of faith can be seen as one. In boating, the rope or chain is so securely connected to the ship and to the anchor that it can be considered "one" with them. This is the case in the Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ, our hope, our anchor. We have become one with Him, so that our faith and our hope are entwined like a braided rope—separate yet working as one, tethering us to our Lord. The Bible says,

"Your faith and hope are in God." (1 Peter 1:21)

Have you ever felt a sense of hopelessness because you could not find a safe harbor for refuge? An anchor is constructed to stabilize a vessel in order to keep it from drifting into other vessels in a harbor or from capsizing in the turbulent waters of the sea.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

We've all experienced that sinking feeling after our lives have drifted off course. Then we find ourselves in trouble, feeling emotionally overwhelmed. If we are not anchored in the promises of Christ, a catastrophic event could send us sinking into a sea of hopelessness. Our commitment should be this:

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23)

Unquestionably, people fail people—all the more reason you need to put your hope in God, who will never fail you. He will be your unshakable rock and refuge.

Psalm 62:5-7 (NASB) 5 My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him.
6 He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken. 7 On God my salvation and my glory rest; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.

Unlike the anchorless person, if you have an anchored life, you will never drown in despair. An anchored life is not at the mercy of chance or circumstance. Swirling currents and pounding waves offer no cause for alarm when you abide in the One who is master over both the storms and the seas.

When you have Christ as your anchor, rather than drowning in despair, you are held secure with His hope. Imagine experiencing within minutes the extremes of both emotions—despair and hope. Imagine Jesus' apostles flailing about on a boat in the midst of a storm, fearing for their very lives. How could He possibly sleep? they wonder. Frantically, they call out to Jesus, "Don't you care if we drown?"

"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'" (Mark 4:39-41)

Psalm 33:20-22 (NASB) 20 Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. 21 For our heart rejoices in Him, Because we trust in His holy name. 22 Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us, According as we have hoped in You.

So Jesus is our Rock. We can trust Him to get us through the storms of life. In the midst of the storm, he brings peace. As Spafford described it, it is peace like a river.

I think about two different kinds of rivers. One river is quiet, serene, moving slowly but confidently toward its destination. Do you have that kind of peace this morning?

John 7:38 (NASB) "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

Jesus stabilizes us with a powerful hold... and a sense of peace. He is strong and steady, and yet His presence brings us peace—a "lightness" even in the heaviest of circumstances... the death of a loved one... a devastating diagnosis. When we are struggling with ourselves and questioning our decisions... when we have unforeseen challenges and changes... when we are doubting who we are and doubting who He is, Jesus anchors us with His power and peace.

The other type of river is more forceful, with white water crashing over rocks, but rushing headlong toward its destination. The peace comes from the confidence that it will reach its destination. Do you have that kind of peace this morning?

Jesus stabilizes us as we move through the "smaller," more minor problems of everyday living. He helps us stay steady with people who gossip and gripe, who lie and are lazy, who pout and are petty, who annoy and are nosey. Jesus anchors us when we have frustrating friends, problems with pets, worry at work... and the list goes on.

John 14:27 (NASB) "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

Jesus stabilizes us when all we can see all around us are problems. His peace is able to anchor us through a variety of situations—poor choices... money problems... prodigal loved ones... painful losses. When our problems are perplexing... and what we see doesn't make sense, Jesus never fails to be our anchor.

Jesus stabilizes us when we are victimized—when vehement verbal abuse, violence, or sexual abuse claws the heart and body—leaving us emotionally and spiritually scarred. For the times when we feel powerless, Jesus is our powerful anchor—holding us strong and secure.

Both types of river have one common characteristic - the supply of water seems inexhaustible.

Jesus proves Himself to be our personal anchor when the storms of life are so perilous that the thought of death seems imminent and the memory of His promises seems to fade.

Jesus stabilizes us when we feel like a ship flailing in the water... tossed from side to side because of a compulsive addiction or besetting sin. In the depth of our souls, He slows us down, helping us to see how our continual wrong choices will wreck our relationships and shatter our dreams. Jesus anchors us when the powerful waves of personal disappointment leave us in despair—a hopeless state in which the only recourse seems to be death... anything to end the pain. Even in the most turbulent times, Jesus is there—He's our Anchor. Jesus proves Himself to be our personal anchor when life hangs in the balance and all hope seems lost.

Psalms 42:5 (NASB) Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NASB) 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Do you have this peace this morning? You can, you know.

1 Peter 5:6-8 (NASB) 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Jesus cares for you. All you need to do is to place your hand in the hand of the one who stills the water and calms the seas. Will you do that this morning? Perhaps you have given your life to Jesus in the past and just need a fresh touch from Him this morning. Or perhaps you have realized that you need to come to Him for the first time this morning. He is here, waiting with outstretched arms, and He wants to give you peace in this life and hope for the future. Will you reach for His hand this morning?

As we sing our closing hymn, won't you come forward and tell us how He is leading you this morning?

*In this sermon, I have borrowed freely from texts on Hope by June Hunt, in the *Biblical Counseling Library*.