

"Hope For 2007"
New Year's
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Introduction

We are about to enter a brand new year. You can picture it much like waking up on a winter morning, looking out to see the yard and street covered with a blanket of fresh, white snow — not a mark, footprint or track.

Each of us have our own unique view and feelings in looking back over 2006 and ahead to 2007. For some its been a good year, and they wish that the new one will be like this one. For others it has been a tough year. They are glad to see it go, and hope the new one will be better. Then there are those who see their past, present, and future all the same — dark and threatening. A manufacturing company salesman in Japan commented, "Sometimes I ask myself, 'Just what is it I am working for, what are my goals. I can't afford to buy a house because land prices are too high. I can't enjoy myself playing golf or tennis because club memberships cost millions of yen and public facilities are always packed. Even driving on weekends is painful because the traffic is so terrible ... I often wonder if I am only working so that I can spend three hours commuting to my office each day ... If that is the case, I think I must be a fool.' "

What is your view of the year ahead? We don't know the details that will unfold this year. Some of us are *hopeful* that it will be a good year; others may be without much *hope*. That is what we are going to look at this morning ... *Hope* ... "*Hope for 2007.*" For many, like the salesman, real hope is elusive. But there is *good news!* There is certain and dependable hope, hope that can be real for us in all the situations and circumstances of the next year.

The Basis Of Hope.

True Hope. True hope is more than wishful thinking. True hope spoken of in the Bible refers to a *certain expectation* for the future. The basis of it is God Himself. God, and *only God*, is the foundation and source of true hope. That reality is clearly stated in the Bible. 1 Timothy 1:1 Paul begins the letter to his friend writing of "... Christ Jesus, who is our *hope*." Later, 4:10, he writes that he and other believers "... have *fixed* our *hope* on the living God ..." True hope, based on God Himself, is a gift God gives to all believers. 2 Thessalonians 2:16 God "... has loved us and given us eternal comfort and *good hope by grace...*"

We see this reality time after time in people's experiences recorded for us in the Bible ... the bad as well as good times. The prophet Jeremiah saw great suffering, cruelty and atrocities at the fall of Jerusalem. He was devastated and horrified. All looked *absolutely hopeless*. He describes his own response,

"This I recall to my mind, therefore I have *hope*. 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.’ ”

(Lamentations 3:21-24)

What is the basis of your hope as you enter 2007? “Well ... in God, of course!” Really? Why is it then that some Christians are living without “*a certain expectation*” for their future? One reason is not knowing the facts, the truths of God through which He gives us hope.

Our hope is not grounded on our own feelings or ideas, but in God, and is based on God’s Word — the objective truth of God in the Bible. The Bible is one of the most precious and gracious gifts God has given. God worked miraculously over a period of about 1,500 years, using the backgrounds, personalities and styles of about 40 authors to give us, to give you and me, His Word for us. What The Bible says, God says through these human authors, and without error. No, the Bible does not answer all our questions. And, yes, some of it is difficult to understand. But the Bible is without error or fault in *all* of its books, chapters, verses and words. This perfect Word of God reveals God to us: His character, truth; His promises and demands; and with 100% accuracy.

Because of this, we have certainty, not just wishful thinking. We have a *certain hope!* The Psalmists knew and clung to this truth.

- Psalm 119:49-50 “Remember the word to Your servant, in which You have made me *hope*. This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me.”
- Psalm 130 opens (v. 1), “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” Then, in verse 5, “I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and *in His word do I hope.*”

What about in our own time? Our condition and needs really are not different; God’s Word is certainly not different. It is the basis for *True Hope*. Journalist Terry Anderson was kidnapped by Moslem extremists on March 15, 1985 and was held by them until December 4, 1991 — 6¾ years. In the first weeks he asked for, and was given a Bible. After the ordeal, “I found consolation and counsel in the Bible. Not *other world*, ‘*this is just a test*’ kind of consolation, but comfort from the real immediate voices of people who had suffered greatly and in ways that seemed so close to what I was going through.” He found a new and profound truth in the words of Romans 15:4, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of *the scriptures* we might have *hope.*”

The Benefits Of Hope.

First, there is well-being, blessing and happiness. People without hope don’t do well. Scientific studies demonstrate this; *and*, we can rely on the studies *because* they square with Scripture. **Prov. 13:12** tells us “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.” People with true hope, based on God and His Word, can do very well, even in very difficult circumstances.

- Psalm 146, a Psalm of joyful praise, tells us, “How blessed [*happy*] is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose *hope* is in the LORD his God.” (verse 5)
- In Romans 12:9-21 the apostle Paul gives a list of responsibilities and opportunities, one of which is “rejoicing in hope.”

Hope in God enables us to be and do well, regardless of the situation. God *is* faithful, He *will* keep us, He *will* care for us; we *will* see Him face to face and be with Him forever. Are there any skeptics? One man who could be a skeptic is anything but. His name is Robert Reed. He often begins his talks with the statement, “I have everything I need for joy!” But he is not your average man. He has cerebral palsy. Author Max Lucado describes him, “His hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He needs help to eat, clean and dress. His shirts are held together by strips of velcro. His speech drags like a worn-out audio cassette.” Yet, he completed University, taught at a College and made a number of short term mission trips ... *before* becoming a missionary in Portugal. There alone, he found a tutor and studied the language. He found a restaurant owner who fed him after rush hours. He often stationed himself in a park where he gave out literature about Jesus. Within six years he introduced 70 people to Jesus Christ as their Savior. He has joy because his life is held together by his real, true hope in God.

Then, there is the benefit of security and strength. The unexpected, disappointing, horrible and tragic do happen. People whose hope is based on God can have the benefit of *Security and Strength* in those times. In Hebrews 6:18-19 the author writes about God’s promises, His faithfulness to them so that

“we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of *the hope* set before us. This *hope* we have as *an anchor* of the soul, a *hope* both *sure and steadfast*.”

We all need God’s security and strength. God opens the floodgates and pours out all that we need as we flee to Him and place all our hope in Him.

Next is a focus for living. There are many people, like the equipment salesman, who don’t have a clear focus of their life and when they do begin to see it more clearly, they don’t like what they see. The Christian’s hope in God gives a crystal clear focus.

- It is “the *hope* laid up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5);
- “the *hope* of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long years ago” (Titus 1:2);
- “the blessed [*happy*] *hope* and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13);
- and “the hope of eternal life” includes being heirs of God. (Titus 3:7).

Yes, with these truths as your hope, you can have a clear, exciting, rewarding *Focus For Living*.

Then there is purity. Purity is being obedient and faithful to God, to His holy character. Because of our sinful human nature, it is not easy; purity requires constant discipline — and that's tough! It is much easier to stick with the familiar and comfortable than to change. ILLUS. One man tells about working with boys at a Christian camp. Things went well. The boys were fairly-well behaved, attentive, learned new things and had fun ... they even *showered every day without complaining!* After camp was over, however, he found things were not all what they seemed ... some of the families found their sons' bags neatly packed ... with *clean clothes* ... just as they were packed before camp! Yes, the boys showered each evening, but in the morning, they put back on the same, dirty old clothes they had worn the day [or days] before. *Why?* One boy explained, "The dirty clothes are more comfortable."

One of the important, and often overlooked, keys to purity is a true, real hope based on God. 1 John 3:2-3,

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has *this hope fixed on Him purifies himself*, just as He [Jesus] is pure."

Jesus is coming again! He is coming for you and me. He could come at any moment. We will see Him. We will be like Him. Sin, weakness, death will be finally and forever gone. This hope fixed on Jesus gives us the desire, the motivation, even the discipline, to do our part in keeping pure ... God will give us the strength as we have our hope fixed firmly on Him.

These are great benefits of *Hope!* You and I *can* have these benefits ... we can have this powerful, beautiful, blossoming hope!

The Blossoming Of Hope.

The blossoming of hope is a process. It is not instant or automatic. It is not a gimmick, nor a self-induced emotional high complete with tingling and goose bumps. It is a process for every believer who has his hope fixed on God.

"Process ... what process? how does it work?" We see the process pictured in **Romans 5:3-5**. Paul opens the chapter by stating the wonderful truths that believers are justified by faith, have peace with God, are standing in grace, are joyful in *hope* of the glory of God. "But," you and I may ask, "how does that work in real, everyday life?" Paul goes on (**verses 3-5**), "... 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 ..."

Briefly, look at the outline of this process:

- The *pressures of life*. The word "tribulation" literally means "pressure." Difficulties, problems *pressure* us. When we stay close to God in the *Pressures of Life*, God uses that to produce →

- *Perseverance*. The quality and ability to keep going, to hang in there. This perseverance, as it is developed and practiced, is used by God to produce →
- *Proven Character*. No longer just knowing what we should be, want to be, but growing in Christ-like character. *Proven character*, in turn is used by God to produce →
- ... *Hope*. And this completes the circle. Only here it is a rich, vibrant hope out of our own experiences of trusting God and finding Him faithful and more than able to take us through.

Hope blossoms through the agony and ecstasy of life. A process which God graciously superintends in the real sweat and grind of life in those who trust Him. There are no short cuts, no secret, magic-like ways to instant maturity ... and real, fulfilling, inspiring hope. This is an ongoing, life-long process through which God continues to give more and more of both the substance and beauty of real hope. It blossoms, giving the beauty and aroma of Christ not just for a few days or a season, but every day and every season.

Conclusion

2007 arrives in about 12 hours. Ready or not, we can't change it. We can't control many of the things which will happen this year. But we don't have to be victims, worried, defeated and discouraged. There *is Hope* for us, for you and me in the year ahead.

In the next moments of personal reflection and response thank God for His faithfulness and grace in this past year ... whatever your year has been like, for God has brought you here, and He has both blessed you with and spared you from many things which you will never know. Commit yourself to live 2007 by faith with your *real* hope being the only *true* hope — God ... Who He is, What He has promised to us.

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