



FAITH THAT GRABS JESUS' ATTENTION (Sermon)

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Scripture Focus: Mark 2:1-12

Suggested Hymns: Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus (524: *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*)

My Faith Looks Up to Thee (517: *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*)

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less (522: *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*)

Introduction

What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'hope'? What is the world's common valuation of hope?

The cynic views hope as a dead-end and nothing more than a fantasy that is created as a result of people's deepest fears. Patrick Henry says, "It is natural to man to indulge in the illusion of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth." Henry Miller states, "Hope is a bad thing. It means that you are not what you want to be." Khaleni Hosseini calls it a "treacherous illusion". On a more positive note, hope is generally described as wanting or desiring better things, wishful thinking, "maybe things will improve someday."

Our world today derides us when, amidst hopelessness, we turn to Jesus. To them we are deluded or hallucinating, hope does not work. Is that how hope is depicted in Scripture? Is it shutting our eyes to the painful reality? Is hope an illusion? Or is it just wishful thinking? What is the Christian's valuation of hope? Let's find out how hope is portrayed in Scripture through the friends whose hope went through the roof and grabbed God's attention.

[Note: Hope and faith will be used interchangeably in this sermon. While faith and hope are different, they are related and they are complementary. Faith is a necessary and sufficient condition for hope, where faith expresses a fact about the present and hope is directed at a future state of affairs.]

Background

Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

The story of the healing of the paralytic highlights precious Bible truths about hope. It is full of hope, drama, and inspiration. The news was out that Jesus was at home – Peter’s house, the home of Jesus in Capernaum. However, a certain unnamed man with paralysis had no way to get to Him. The man’s four friends knew about the dilemma and stepped in to help. Luke 5:20 states that Jesus “*saw their faith.*” What caused Jesus to take special note of their faith? What makes your faith visible to God? Is it the religious symbols you wear and hang in your house or the t-shirts with Bible verses? Is it the frequency of your prayers and fasting? Is it the length of your skirts or the jacket and tie you always wear? Is it the adherence to health reform? What is it about your faith that God sees? There are a number of lessons we can draw from these friends’ hope. Today I would like to share with you just four qualities that form the type of faith that grabs God’s attention.

Qualities of the faith that grabs Jesus’ attention

1. *Faith that initiates – Mark 2:2, 3*

- There was a large crowd comprised of three basic groups: (1) ordinary folks, (2) Jewish rulers, and (3) Jesus and His disciples
- Luke 5:17 – Luke makes an important statement; “...*and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*” There is no evidence of this “*power to heal*” until the paralytic joins the crowd. Why is there no evidence of any healing?
 - Assumption – there were many sick people in Capernaum who had family and friends, but none cared to take the initiative to bring them to Jesus.
 - Lack of faith – The Messenger of the Lord claims that the Jewish rulers did not recognize the presence of that “*power to heal*” [DA:196] . They did not feel a sense of need, hence, none were healed. (Luke 1:53)
- Then there was a fourth group which joined the crowd at a later stage that was not initially among the crowd. This was a very small group with a different kind of faith (Mark 2:3). Four friends brought their sick friend to Jesus. Some people talk the talk, but these friends walked the talk – their faith had legs, it had feet. James 2:17 states that “*faith without works is dead.*” Anyone can believe in God – even the devils believe and tremble. Anyone can claim to have hope – it remains dead until it is exercised – until it takes initiative – until it walks – until it does – until it acts. Faith is a doing word—a verb, it’s an action word. Jesus calls us to action. He says “*come all ye*” - “*cast your net*” – “*choose you this day*”- “*come follow me*” – “*go ye therefore.*”

2. *Faith that persists – Mark 2:2, 4*

- Mark states that “*there was no room.*” The house was full, the entrance was blocked. They could not reach Jesus and neither could they even hear His voice, but they knew He was in the house and that “*the power to heal was with Him.*” It seemed hopeless. They could have blamed the crowd, each other, the sick man, the Pharisees and scribes, the disciples, the house, Jesus, even the devil. But they didn’t. Neither did they give up. How could they give up when the Desire of Ages was so near? Their faith persisted.
- Notice that the ‘normal’ and easy way to Jesus was blocked (the door). Some would have decided to wait; after all if one door closes, God opens another. Some would have waited until God ‘opened another door.’ Remember the song “*He will make a way where there seems to be no way*”?
- Instead, they chose to do something about it – to climb the stairs and “*go through the roof.*” This expression is used to imply that something has suddenly gone sky high – seemingly out of control – such as prices or tempers. Although the direction is not up, since the man is let down “*through the roof,*” I suppose the situation here was out of control as well. (Archaeologists discovered a house which they believed to be Peter’s – a flat-roofed house and accessible by means of an outside stairway. The roof was made of crisscrossed tree branches, thatch, and compacted earth).
- What a dramatic story in the Bible! Perhaps you think they went too far. It’s normal to think that way. Imagine sitting/standing at that prayer meeting. Suddenly you hear sounds on the roof and feel debris falling onto your head. Next, a bunch of men are lowering a bed through an opening on the roof. Quite a scene! A dramatic intrusion indeed! But this is not about normal or ordinary friends but friends of hope and extraordinary faith.
- This act can be argued as a disruption to Jesus’ teaching, but was it really a disruption? To Jesus was it really an intrusion? Jesus was not shocked, not surprised, not perplexed at all. The Messenger of the Lord discloses that Jesus had actually seen this man while he was still at home. “[*He*] had watched the first glimmer of faith grow into a belief that He was the sinner’s only helper, and had seen it grow stronger with every effort to come into His presence”[DA:196]. “Our Heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing” (STC:54). What a pity we do not go to Him with our burdens, yet He calls us to “*come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). You cannot burden Him. You cannot weary Him. He holds the universe in His hands, so nothing is too heavy for Him to bear. Neither is anything too small, for He even cares about the hairs of your head. You can never interrupt Jesus; He is never too busy for you. He invites you and me to come to Him when we are weak and heavy laden.

Remember the woman who touched Jesus' garment and the thief on the cross – you can never disturb Jesus.

- Many have faith and they have hope, but they give up when obstacles appear, such as when the door is blocked, when crowds discourage them, when it seems like heaven is too far for their prayers to reach Jesus, or as though Jesus were standing aloof at a distance, or as though our Master were deaf. The Messenger of the Lord stresses that *“Perseverance in prayer has been made a condition of receiving”* [STC:56]. Remember Bartimaeus in Mark 10:48 and how he would not let the crowd silence him? He kept calling and he called out even louder when the crowd would have silenced him, *“Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!”* When the door is closed, this kind of hope goes through the roof – it breaks apart strongholds – it holds on until it receives – it wrestles until it receives the blessing. What's paralyzing you today? What kind of palsy do you have? Guilt, pain, anger, bitterness, financial burdens, laziness, drug dependency, marital conflict, stubbornness, unemployment? Don't give up. Press on because it won't be very long. You might be at the brink of your miracle, so hold on to that last thread of hope.

3. *Faith that Jesus sees – Mark 2:5*

- These men were serious with Jesus. They had confidence that Jesus would heal their friend. According to the Messenger of the Lord, this man *“had lost all hope of recovery”* [DA:195]. Not only did he long for physical healing, but he also yearned, even more, for spiritual restoration. The Pharisees and doctors who had once been his hope of recovery had callously pronounced him incurable. His was in a hopeless situation. There was no hope of healing and, I suppose, he may have sunk into depression. Would this Jesus heal him; if not from the palsy, at least from the burden of sin? The hope that grew within him didn't care what doctors had said. It's a hope that doesn't care what family or neighbors say – it's a bold, stubborn faith. A hope that knows that Jesus delights in blessing His children. A hope that acknowledges that *“there is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel”* (STC:58). He takes immediate interest in every anxiety that harasses our souls, every calamity that befalls us. This kind of hope is *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil”* (Hebrews 6:19).
- This faith does not crawl through the door, or stand in the line, or wait for its turn with a stiff upper lip, or sit down and complain and blame others or God. Instead it goes through the roof. The man's *“wasted flesh was already showing signs of decay”* (DA:196), possibly from pressure sores. There was no time to waste complaining, blaming, or sulking. The man did not allow himself to be held captive by ever-growing despair. Yes, despair was real, but it would not stop him from his miracle. Though the crowd was so dense that they could not penetrate through it, they had to

get to Jesus somehow. And they did. That kind of faith could not escape Jesus' attention. Indeed, He saw it.

- Jesus did not only notice the sick man's faith, but He also saw the faith of his friends. Jesus honors our faith when we help in the salvation of others. How many of our family members, neighbors, and friends are waiting for us to carry them to Christ? Sometimes the door is blocked, so what creative ideas can we come up with to bring them to Jesus? The four friends had hope, not because of what they saw in their sick friend, but rather because of what they knew Christ to be. What do you know Christ to be?

4. *Faith that obeys – Mark 2:11-12*

- Jesus pronounced forgiveness of the man's sins. In response to the Scribes and Pharisees, He validated their accusation with a visual miracle. He is God indeed! Both body and soul were restored by the power of Christ. If He could restore the spiritual, how could He fail to heal the physical as well? God is not limited in what He can do. He asks, "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" (*Genesis 18:14*).
- Notice that Jesus commanded and the man immediately obeyed in faith; no excuse, no complaint. He believed that through Christ's power, his almost lifeless body had been restored (see John 10:10). He was quick to do as Christ commanded him, and then he walked away with joy and hope written all over his countenance. Hope begets hope. Look at the kind of obedience this man had. He didn't spend time wondering if his limbs would move. Some things that God asks us to do are simple, yet they make the difference between a miracle and none; between life and death (eg. Naaman, ten lepers, Zacchaeus). To you and me, He bids us to ask, to believe, to confess.

My friends, is hope an illusion? No way! Faith, hope, and love (*1 Corinthians 13:13*) are the fundamental Christian virtues. The story of the man with palsy stands out in sharp contrast to the cynical worldview of hope. It is the road we travel, from the place we currently reside to the place we want to go. It does not dismiss the current situation but is characterized by the confidence that the power of God will get us through the existing hopeless situation. A certain author defined it as "waiting in confident expectation for God's promises in Christ." It is not a treacherous illusion but is certainty in Christ "*who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...*" (*Ephesians 3:20*). It is assured confidence in the One who declares that "*nothing is impossible with God*" (*Luke 1:37*).

While many desire something better, hope is much more than just a desire or positive thinking. It is assured expectation based on God's love and promises. Paul marvels how "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" (*Romans 8:32*). Here is the pledge of our unquenchable hope. The cross is the pledge that He will never forsake His children for whom He gave His life. Jesus left

the splendor of heaven knowing that the old rugged cross on the lonely hill of Golgotha was waiting for Him. And when He was on that cruel cross, you were on His mind. He could have called a myriad of angels to deliver Him, yet not the nails but love for you and me held Him to that cross.

Conclusion

This hope, my friends, “*does not disappoint*” (Romans 5:5). It is not an illusion. Nor is it dead or merely wishful thinking. It is a bridge that spans the chasm created by sin. It is the assured expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness. God is looking for such a hope, one that grabs His attention, a hope that is unshakable, immovable, a faith that goes through the roof. Even in death, we can rest in the hope that Jesus, who conquered death and the grave, is coming back for us and will raise us up to eternal life. For “*we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:13).

My friend, do you want this kind of hope? Do you want this kind of faith? Do you want to be this kind of friend whose faith defies all obstacles? I urge you to learn from these five friends and completely trust God to develop in you such faith – faith that initiates, faith that persists, faith that obeys, faith that grabs God’s attention. If that is your prayer today, please stand up with me as we pray together.

Key: DA – *The Desire of Ages*

STC – *Steps to Christ*