

A Great Congregation Holds Forth Hope For The Hopeless

1 Peter 1:3-5

Several years ago a Chicago newspaper carried a story about a young father who killed himself in a tavern phone booth. He had called the newspaper to tell them he had sent them a manila envelope outlining his story. The police found the man dead in the phone booth -- he had shot himself. In his pocket they found a child's crayon drawing and written on it was a note: "Please leave it in my pocket. I want to have it buried with me."

His name was James Lee. He had no family. His wife had died a few years before. His blonde haired daughter was killed in a fire five months previously. For some reason James Lee felt there was no other way out of his situation. He thought he had lost everything that had any value in his life. Apparently, he felt like he had no future: he felt hopeless.

The only time I have ever experienced hopelessness is in a couple of nightmares that seemed so real, I could not tell that I was asleep. Otherwise, I have never known hopelessness, but many others do every day. You may be sitting next to someone who feels his or her life is hopeless. It may be someone you have recently met or it may be someone you've known for years, like a son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister, or even your spouse.

What I want to talk about tonight is the fact that if we want to be a great congregation in 1995, we need to be a congregation which brings hope to the hopeless.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -- kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (NIV)

Very encouraging words, especially when there is seemingly no hope in your life. People all over are looking for something substantial to which they can hold, something secure, something stable.

It's kind of like that commercial that has been broadcast lately. It starts with the sound a door bell. A sound that might bring hope and anticipation to many people, but to little Sally it brings despair because little Sally does not want to hear the doorbell a second time for the simple reason her father might be resting and awakened by the bell and who knows what might happen then. He might simply yell "Somebody get the door." Or he might actually hit someone because they didn't get it quickly enough.

I can't imagine living under those conditions, but there is hope for little Sally and there is hope for many others like her.

Certainly an example of hopelessness would be the Titanic which capsized over three quarters of a century ago on April 15th, 1912. There were 2,200 people on board, people from all walks of life. When the ship began sinking, however, it was discovered that there were life boats for only 700. 1500 others stayed aboard while the ship slowly sank. The band continued to play. Those in the life boats could only watch and listen to the cries of drowning hopeless people.

That's hopelessness. Nothing could be done. If you can somehow understand that concept, you can imagine our own situation without Christ. We sang a song as young people

1. Without him I would be nothing, Without him I'd surely fail
Without him I would be drifting, like a ship without a sail
2. Without him I would be dying, Without him I'd be enslaved,
Without him life would be hopeless, but with Jesus Thank God I'm saved!

Look at the hopeless people in the Bible

1. The woman with the issue of blood. **Mark 5:25-30** And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and ***had spent all she had***, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

Hopeless, but then there was hope in the form of Jesus:

27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (NIV)

2. The lepers who were found everywhere:

a. Luke 4:27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed -- only Naaman the Syrian." (NIV)

b. Jesus went into their homes Matthew 26:

c. He touched their bodies Matthew 8:2-3 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. (NIV)

3. The woman who was a social outcast: Luke 7:37-39 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

4. The woman taken in adultery: John 8

5. Then there is the little matter of ourselves: Ephesians 2:12-13 remember that at that time **you** (we) were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus **you** (we) who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (NIV)

How do we bring hope to the hopeless?

1. We must have the right image:

If we are not perceived as a source of hope, the hopeless will remain hopeless.

Matthew 5:14-16--talks of a light that shines into the world: We are that light. When people are in darkness and see light, those who are lost can find hope and refuge in that light. If we keep our light hidden, there is no hope, no refuge.

How do we bring hope to the hopeless?

2. We must have the right courage.

I mentioned this morning the idea of taking the message to others and fearing what might happen: We might be rejected, we might be ignored, we might be even be ridiculed.

Jesus said in **John 14**, "Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me." and in **Matthew 28:20**, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the world."

It took faith and courage for Jesus to involve himself with lepers.

How do we bring hope to the hopeless?

3. We must have the right perspective

Who do we want to think well of us? Jesus or someone else?

Which is more important: hope for the hopeless or comfort for the proud?

Jesus seemed to think that those who were without hope were rather important. If Jesus were around today, I can see him involving himself with people others might consider nerds, or maybe even drug addicts, or prostitutes.. No, Jesus would not participate in their activities, but he would participate in their lives. I can see Jesus involving his life in the lives of those in special olympics, or with wounded veterans, or other handicapped people. There's where Jesus would be.

You say, but that might take me to inappropriate places. If you have the right perspective in mind, you can go where many Christians have not gone before.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:16-19 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17 "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'" But **wisdom is proved right by her actions.**" (NIV)

How do we bring hope to the hopeless?

4. We must have the right purpose.

Is it our purpose to find the faults of others?

John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (NIV)

Jesus' purpose was to heal the broken hearted and to lift up the lowly. What is our purpose?

How do we bring hope to the hopeless?

5. We must have the right concern.

If we have the right concern, it will be seen by where our attention is focused. How much attention do we give to the hopeless?

I must refer to Matthew 25 where Jesus talked about the King who divided the people as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats and the rewards that each received.

Do you remember who received the reward of eternal life? Those who fed the hungry, healed the sick, visited those imprisoned, was hospitable to strangers, clothed the naked, gave drink to the thirsty.

Do you remember who received the reward of eternal death? Those who did not feed the hungry, nor healed the sick, nor visited those imprisoned, nor was hospitable to strangers, nor clothed the naked, nor gave drink to the thirsty.

Where is our concern?

James Lee gave up in his despair and made a bad choice by taking his own life. Maybe we can be there for someone else who is wanting to make the same bad choice and give them hope instead. Maybe we can be there for someone else who is thinking of making some other bad choice and give them hope instead.

Do you have the courage?

Will you make that your purpose?

If you care, and have not been caring before, make a change in your life, be a hope giver. Help make this congregation a light for those in darkness, a refuge in time of need, a hope for the hopeless.

Invitation.