There Is Always Hope In The Lord!

By Rich Carmicheal

"But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Rom. 8:25).

The Scriptures abound with the truth that our God is a God of hope and has the ability to provide help in seemingly hopeless situations. For example, consider the thirtieth chapter of Jeremiah and how the prophet describes the hopeless condition of God's people: *"Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you"* (vv. 12-13). And yet, just four verses later, the Lord declares, *"But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds…"* (v. 17). Though their situation seemed beyond hope, God promised to intervene and provide what they needed. In this particular case, though their sin would lead them into captivity, the Lord promised to have compassion on them and restore them. There would again come *"songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing"* (v. 19).

Jesus teaches that *"In this world you will have trouble…"* (John 16:33), and we know all too well that life does indeed bring its share of trials and troubles. But the truth embedded in Jeremiah chapter 30 and many other Scriptures is that no matter how difficult, overwhelming, or seemingly hopeless our circumstances may be or may become, there is always hope for us in the Lord. Just as we can be certain that difficulties will come, we can also be certain that hope is available in the midst of those difficulties. This is true not because of who we are and the limited resources we have available, for we certainly find ourselves at times in situations that are well beyond us. Instead, hope is always available because of who our God is and the unlimited resources He has available. He is a God of hope, and He has the resources to save, heal, deliver, restore, renew, forgive, guide, comfort, encourage, strengthen, provide, open doors, grant wisdom, and the list goes on and on. As Jeremiah exclaims in prayer, *"Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You"* (Jer. 32:17).

Hope for Comfort and Provision

A number of accounts in the Bible illustrate how the Lord intervenes in various circumstances. Consider, for example, the Book of Ruth and how hopeless Naomi's situation appeared. First of all, she and her husband and two sons had to move from Bethlehem in Judah to Moab because of a famine in Judah. Then her husband died, leaving her with her two sons. They married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, but after about ten years, the two sons died. Now imagine Naomi's sorrow as she was in a foreign land without her husband and her two sons, and imagine her great concern for her two daughters-in-law who were without husbands. When she heard that the Lord had provided food again in Judah, she decided to return, but encouraged Orpah and Ruth to return to their homes with the prayer that the Lord would help each find another husband. Notice how she had really given up hope regarding her own situation: *"Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still*

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hope for me – even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons – would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!" (Ruth 1:12-13).

Although Naomi did not remarry, she could not have imagined how wonderfully the Lord would bless her life. As you know, Ruth returned to Bethlehem with Naomi and married her relative Boaz. The Lord blessed Ruth with a son, and the women said to Naomi, *"Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer…He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth"* (Ruth 4:14-15). Then *"Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son'"* (Ruth 4:16-17). This son was named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David. How could Naomi have ever imagined in her desperate situation in Moab all that the Lord would do for her and her family!

The prophet Jeremiah, in the Book of Lamentations, gives us another picture of how we can hope in the Lord to bring us out of the depths of affliction and grief: *"I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, 'My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.' I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord"* (Lam. 3:17-26). Or, in the words of the Psalmist, *"…You have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life"* (Psa. 119:49-50).

Hope for Forgiveness and Restoration

We also have the hope that we can be forgiven and restored from sin. Consider the desperate situation described in the Book of Ezra as God's people realized how greatly they had sinned by not keeping themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices (Ezra 9:1-2). As Ezra prayed, confessed, and wept over this sin, and as a large crowd also wept bitterly over the sin, Shecaniah said to Ezra, *"We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for us"* (Ezra 10:2). It certainly is true that there is hope even when we have sinned, if we will repent of that sin and return to the Lord. Our God is full of forgiveness and restoration.

The Psalmist echoes this hope in Psalm 130:1-7: *"Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption."* Or, as Psalm 39:7-8 states, *"My hope is in You. Save me from all my transgressions."*

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The Apostle Peter is a wonderful example of the hope of forgiveness and redemption from sin. When he failed horribly and three times denied knowing Jesus, it must have seemed to him that he had completely lost his relationship with the Lord and his opportunity to serve as a leader of God's people. And yet, Jesus extended forgiveness to him and reinstated him to ministry, establishing him as the primary leader in the early church.

Hope for a Better Future

Job's life serves as a great example of how the Lord can create a great future out of a miserable situation. His circumstances were so terrible, he shared with his friends, *"My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me... My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow…My days have passed, my plans shattered, and so are the desires of my heart…where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?"* (Job 17:1-16). And yet, Job never truly lost his hope in the Lord as is clear from this powerful declaration, *"Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him…"* (Job 13:15). In the end, Job's hope and trust in the Lord were rewarded as *"the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before"* (Job 42:10) and *"blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first"* (Job 42:12).

The Lord desires to give us a good future, even if we are in difficult circumstances at present. Consider, for example, this wonderful promise the Lord makes through the prophet Jeremiah: *"When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill My gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart"* (Jer. 29:10-13).

Of course, our greatest hope for the future is the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Hope for Renewed Strength

The struggles and problems of life have the potential to wear us down, and can even lead us to wonder if the Lord really cares for us. But the prophet Isaiah reminds us that when we hope in the Lord, our strength will be renewed: *"Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint"* (Isa. 40:27-31).

The prophet Micah also reminds us that even when we live in the midst of ungodliness, violence, evil, corruption, confusion, deceit, family turmoil, etc., we can count on the Lord to sustain us as we hope in Him. Notice Micah's description of the terrible conditions around him, and yet his hope and confidence that the Lord will see him through: *"What misery is mine! ...The*

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godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire – they all conspire together. The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion. Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words. For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies are the members of his own household. But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light" (Micah 7:1-8).

Hope for the Impossible

Because the Lord is omnipotent, we can also hope for things that from man's perspective are impossible. Consider, for example, how the Lord intervened in Abraham's impossible situation to bless him not only with a son, but with a nation of descendants. Although Abraham was about a hundred years old and his body was as good as dead, and Sarah's womb was also dead, he did not waver in his faith (Rom. 4:19-20). Instead, *"against all hope, Abraham in hope believed…"* (Rom. 4:18). His hope in the Lord was not disappointed, as the Lord showed Himself faithful to His promise and enabled Sarah to give birth to Isaac, the first in a great line of descendants that would in time include Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Hope for Strength in the Face of Opposition

As we hope in the Lord, we can count on Him to keep us strong when we face enemies. Notice the opposition described by David in Psalm 62, and his confidence that the Lord will keep him from being shaken: *"How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down – this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. Selah. Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge…"* (Psa. 62:3-8).

Consider also the similar hope expressed in Psalm 71: *"Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men. For You have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth…Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. For my enemies speak against me; those who wait to kill me conspire together. They say, 'God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him.' Be not far from me, O God; come quickly, O my God, to help me. May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace. But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise You more and more"* (Psa. 71:4-5, 9-14).

Hope for a Return of Joy and Encouragement

Many things in life have the potential to rob our joy, such as sin, troubles, personal losses,

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and so forth. You may be able to well identify with the Psalmist's heart cry, *"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?"* (Psalm 42:5). Or perhaps you can understand Elijah's despair described in 1 Kings 19:4-5: *"He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep."*

The good news in both of these accounts is that the Lord is able to restore joy and encouragement. In the case of Psalm 42:5, the Psalmist immediately goes on to say to his downcast soul, *"Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God."* He was confident that God would bring him through this time of discouragement to a time when his heart would again be filled with praise. In the case of Elijah, the Lord sent an angel to care for him, and he was strengthened and able to continue on with the Lord (1 Kings 19:5ff.).

The Apostle Paul, in a prayer in Romans 15:13, reminds us how the Lord is able to fill us with joy: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* Likewise, he prays in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, *"May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."*

The prophet Isaiah paints many beautiful pictures of how the Lord is able to bring life and joy to seemingly hopeless situations. For example, he declares that *"the desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy…. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come…'"* (Isa. 35:1-4). As the Psalmist adds, *"O Lord, You brought me up from the grave; You spared me from going down into the pit. …Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning"* (Psa. 30:3-5).

Building Our Hope on the Lord's Word

The hope we have in the Lord is not wishful thinking, but it is the confident expectation that He will do what He says He will do. Therefore, the source of our hope is the Lord Himself and His Word. *"You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in Your Word"* (Psa. 119:114).

The Apostle Paul describes how vital the Lord's Word is to our hope: *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4). As we take the Lord's Word to heart and trust Him to fulfill His promises, we can be confident that He will be faithful to His Word. No matter whether we need comfort, encouragement, guidance, forgiveness, restoration, joy, provision, strength, endurance, or anything else good from Him, we can trust Him completely to be faithful to His character and His Word. We can always confidently place our hope in Him!

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