**HEALTHY CHURCHES HOLD OUT HOPE**

**(1 Corinthians 15)**

Possibly, my all-time favorite musical is the musical adaptation of the Victor Hugo novel, *Les Misérables.* In some ways it is hauntingly beautiful. One of the most powerful songs in the musical is the one sung by a young woman named Fantine. She’s sick. She’s poor. She’s misunderstood. She’s taken advantage of by uncaring men. Her only child is being cared for by strangers who charge her more money than she can afford to pay for her daughter’s upkeep.

Ten years ago, the English woman, Susan Boyle, became famous when she sang the song sung by Fantine on the show Great Britain’s Got Talent. Her performance has been viewed more than 33.5 million times on YouTube. The name of the song is, “I Dreamed a Dream.” Listen to just a portion of the lyrics:

I dreamed a dream in times gone by  
When hope was high and life worth living  
I dreamed, that love would never die  
I dreamed that God would be forgiving  
Then I was young and unafraid  
And dreams were made and used and wasted  
There was no ransom to be paid  
No song unsung, no wine untasted

Unfortunately, that woman’s dreams turned into a nightmare. Listen to the closing words of the song:

But there are dreams that cannot be  
And there are storms we cannot weather  
I had a dream my life would be  
So different from this hell I'm living  
So different now from what it seemed  
Now life has killed the dream  
I dreamed

Has life killed the dream you dreamed? Is your life different now that the one you once thought you would be living? I think most of us would have to say “yes” to those questions. As far as I can tell, none of us are famous, or rich, or influential. None of us are successful in the world’s view of success. I seriously think we need to redefine what success is from God’s point of view. It has been said that to be a success as Christian means that you are faithful to God.

I would say that we have something very important and very valuable that those who don’t know the Lord don’t have. We have hope. The lost world does not have true hope. Where do you get hope? You can’t buy hope in a store. You can’t work for it. You can’t steel in from someone else.

The place to start is to define what true, biblical hope is. In an Easter message, pastor Bryan Wilkerson said:

Hope is not a what, or a when, or a why. Hope is a “who.” Things don't get better just because we want them to. They get better because somebody does something. Hope is always embodied in a person. Shareholders hope the new CEO can turn the company around. Citizens hope a new leader can get their country back on track. Red Sox nation hopes a new manager can lift their team out of the doldrums. Hope is a “who.” [We need] Somebody wise enough, strong enough, good enough, to get us to a better place.

I have a question. If hope is a who, who is our hope? Jesus is our hope.

We have been studying 1 Corinthians, and today we come to chapter 15. Chapter 12 is known as the spiritual gift chapter. Chapter 13 is the love chapter. Chapter 15 has been called “the resurrection chapter.” It deals with Jesus’ resurrection that has already taken place and our resurrection which has yet to take place. I think we could also call this “the hope chapter.”

We have been focusing on the thing that healthy churches do. The big idea of this message is that healthy churches hold out hope. People need hope. They need a reason to get up in the morning. They need something that will give their lives meaning. That can be found in this chapter, and healthy churches focus on hope. People don’t need more law. They don’t need more judgment. They don’t need more guilt. They need more hope.

There are three things that I want so say that emerge from this 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians.

1. **OUR HOPE IS BASED ON WHAT JESUS DID YESTERDAY.**

The word “hope” is only used one time in this chapter, and yet this chapter is all about hope. Paul begins by looking at the basis of our hope. Paul calls it the gospel, which means “good news.” It is the good news of Jesus and what Jesus did that gives us hope.

Look at the first two verses. Are you standing upon the truth of the gospel? Maybe we should change the lyrics of the hymn “Standing on the Promises” to “Standing on the Gospel.”

Archimedes, when emphasizing the power of a lever or the fulcrum said, “Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world.”

God has given us a place to stand, the Gospel, and with the power of His word and the Holy Spirit, God will use us to move the world to faith in Christ.

In vv. 3-4, Paul gives us the basics of the gospel. Christ died. He really, physically, actually died. There was nothing pretend about Jesus’ death. He didn’t die in a spiritual sense. He died. He quit breathing. His heart quit beating. He was verifiably dead when His body was taken down from the cross. And then Jesus was buried. That is what you do with dead bodies. And then, on the third day, Jesus arose with a resurrection body. He defeated death. Again, Jesus did not rise in a spiritual sense. He physically rose from the dead.

In vv. 5-8, Paul gives us a rundown of the resurrection appearances of Jesus. He gives us an account of those who saw the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes. There is no more powerful witness than the testimony of an eye-witness. There were not just one or two who conspired to say they saw Jesus. There were over 500 hundred people who saw Jesus alive again after His resurrection.

If 500 plus people saw someone commit a murder and they all could identify the murderer, the prosecution is going to be able to present a case that the attorney for the defender is not going to be able to beat.

Christians can make an incredibly strong case that Jesus did indeed do what both Scripture and Jesus foretold He would do—He rose from the dead with a resurrection body.

It is what Jesus did yesterday, about 2000 years ago to be closer to the time period, that serves as the basis for our hope.

Rick Warren is the pastor of Saddleback Church and the author of the enormously popular book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. In 2013, he and his wife, Kay, went through a devastating loss when their twenty-seven-year-old son Matthew took his own life after battling depression and mental illness for years.

About a year after this tragedy, Rick said:

I’ve often been asked, “How have you made it? How have you kept going in your pain?” And I’ve often replied, “The answer is Easter.”

You see, the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus happened over three days. Friday was the day of suffering and pain and agony. Saturday was the day of doubt and confusion and misery. But Easter—that Sunday—was the day of hope and joy and victory.

And here’s the fact of life: you will face these three days over and over and over in your lifetime. And when you do, you’ll find yourself asking—as I did—three fundamental questions. Number one, “What do I do in my days of pain?” Two, “How do I get through my days of doubt and confusion?” Three, “How do I get to the days of joy and victory?”

The answer is “Easter.” The answer is “Easter!”

What are you going through that is tough? What heartache do you have that threatens your joy? What fear do your harbor that is keeping peace at bay? Whatever it is, the antidote to that heartache or fear is Easter, the resurrection of Jesus. What Jesus did on the cross and at the tomb is the basis for your hope and mine.

1. **OUR HOPE CONSISTS OF WHAT GOD WILL DO TOMORROW.**

In this chapter, Paul moves from Christ’s resurrection to our resurrection. Verse 19 is the one verse where *hope* is used. Our hope extends beyond today into tomorrow. Our hope goes far beyond our three score and ten.

Look at vv. 22-26.

Beginning in v. 35 Paul begins to describe the nature of this resurrection body. Let me read vv. 42-57.

The Greeks of Paul’s day taught that the body is bad and the spirit is good. Death was to be preferred over life because when you died, you would finally be released from your sinful body. Because they believed the physical body was inherently sinful, the idea of a resurrection, getting a new body was repugnant to them. It was repulsive and ridiculous to think that we would once again be shackled with another physical body after having gotten rid of it. It didn’t sound like good news, at all.

Both the Jews and Christians, however, believe that God’s original creation was good. Yes, both we and the world are fallen because of sin. God’s creation has been marred by sin, but when Jesus returns, God’s original intent will be restored.

When we think of heaven, we have this odd idea of sitting upon a cloud, strumming a harp, and being part of an endless worship service. That is not heaven at all.

The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns, the present earth will give way to a recreated earth; we will be resurrected; heaven will come down to this earth, and we will live eternally here, not up there somewhere.

It is worth noting that Adam and Eve were given a job to do before the fall. I believe that in heaven we will have jobs to do, but our work will not be toilsome and drudgery. Our work will be fulfilling and meaningful. Just as with now, our work then will be a way of bringing honor to God.

There will be some differences though. Some lines of work now will not exist then. In the eternal state, we won’t need funeral directors. We won’t need physicians, surgeons, and psychiatrists. We won’t need prison guards and penal institutions. I don’t think we will need homicide detectives. We won’t even need revival preachers or evangelists. And we won’t need lawyers or bail bondsmen. I am sure there are other jobs that won’t be needed in what we call heaven.

I can’t see any reason we wouldn’t need farmers, and ranchers, and teachers, and manufactures, and builders, and artists, and inventors, and much of what we have now.

Listen to what pastor and author Tim Keller says about the Christian’s hope for the future:

When my wife was growing up, every summer her family spent two weeks at a small compound of cottages on the shores of Lake Erie. Now the cottages are all gone—in fact that part of the beach is gone. Whenever she visits that childhood vacation spot, she weeps because she knows the beech is irretrievable. That sense of irretrievability is like a death. And the older we all get, the more we realize that certain losses are irretrievable; they’re gone, and that sucks the joy out of our lives.

But here’s where Christ’s resurrection offers something unique. Even religions that promise a kind of spiritual future or spiritual bliss, only offer consolation for what you’ve lost. But the resurrection of Christ even promises the restoration of what you’ve lost. You don’t just get your body back; you get the body you always wanted but you never had. You don’t just get your life back; you get the life that you always wanted that you never had.

But Jesus Christ is walking proof that you will miss nothing. Nothing! It’s all coming in the future. It’s going to be unimaginably wonderful. There is no religion, no philosophy, and no human being who can offer this kind of future. And as Christians our hope for the future is based on the historical fact of the resurrection. So, if you are not a Christian, let me ask: Why wouldn’t you want that? Even if you don’t like different aspects of the Christian faith, why wouldn’t you want this hope for restoration? You’re not being honest with yourself if you don’t want that.

We have looked at yesterday and tomorrow. What Jesus did yesterday forms the basis of our hope. What God is going to do for us tomorrow is the substance of our hope. What about today? What about the here and the now?

1. **OUR HOPE TRANSFORMS HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES TODAY.**

Notice how Paul ends the chapter. Look at v. 58. The first word of v. 58 is important. Paul wrote, “therefore.” In other words, he is saying, “In light of everything I have just written about Jesus’ resurrection that has already happened and your resurrection that is going to happen, there are three things you are to be and one thing you are to know.”

We are to be steadfast. We are to be immovable. This harkens back to what Paul wrote in vv. 1-2. He ends the chapter in much the same way that he began it. Don’t let the world dislodge you from your secure position. Don’t let them cause you to second guess your convictions.

The problem many believers have is they hold opinions instead of convictions. Opinions are like noses; everyone has one. It has been said that an opinion is something you hold, but a conviction is something that holds you.

Somebody, tell me about a conviction that holds you.

The third thing we are to be is always abounding in the work of the Lord. That means, we don’t give up; we don’t retire; we don’t say, “I’ve done my time. It is someone else’s turn to serve.” No! We keep going. We keep bearing fruit. We keep on keeping on.

We do that because of the one thing we know. We know that it all matters. It all makes a difference. We can’t rescue everybody, but we can rescue somebody. Paul urged the believers in Galatia to not give up because they were going to reap a harvest if they didn’t give up.

In the verse before the last verse of chapter 15, Paul claimed God is giving us the victory through Jesus Christ. It doesn’t always look that way. It doesn’t always feel that way.

When you survey what is going on in our culture, it appears that we are losing. Churches are closing their doors. Attendance is dwindling. Our influence seems to be negligible. While some are hostile towards the church, most are just plain indifferent to the church and the Christian faith. They view the Bible and the church as irrelevant to their lives. It seems that the devil is winning a one-sided victory.

But as they say, “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.”

January 3, 1993 is a date that is etched in the memory of Buffalo Bills fans. On that day, the Houston Oilers held a halftime lead of 28-3 over the Bills. During the first half, Oiler quarterback, Warren Moon, had the greatest two quarters of his career. At halftime, the TV commentators talked about who Houston might play the following week before they made it to the Super Bowl.

The second half started with a Houston Oiler returning a 58-yard interception. Now, the Oilers led 35-3. There seemed to be no hope of the Bills making a comeback. But all of that changed. In the final 21 minutes of the ball game, the Bills engineered the greatest comeback in NFL history. They overcame a 32-point deficit and won the game in overtime with a field goal.

To our eyes, it may appear that we are losing and there is no hope for a comeback. Just remember, however, that there is victory in Jesus. On behalf of His church, He will stage the most incredible comeback of all time.

We have victory in Jesus. We have plenty of reason to hope and to celebrate!

Pastor Wilkerson said, “[Jesus’] resurrection proves that He is stronger than any setback, any failure, any loss, any disappointment—any tiger that comes at night. If life has a way of killing dreams, Jesus has a way of bringing them back to life.”

Do you need hope? Do you know someone who needs hope? In the words of an Anne Graham Lotz book, *Just Give Me Jesus.* Just give them Jesus. Trust Jesus. Look for Jesus. Let Him be the who of your hope.