

Hope In The Dark

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the promised King and Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Certain things in life are absolutely necessary. I'm not talking about death and taxes... Air is necessary. Without it you can only survive a few minutes. We need water, also. Humans can only live about three days without water. We also need hope. Life without hope is difficult, if not impossible.



(*Slide*) In the hierarchy of mental health needs Hope is at the tippitytop of all the things we need for good, sound mental health. In today's lesson, the prophet Isaiah is giving a message of hope to the people of Israel. Hope is like light shining in the darkness. Because the dawn of hope has come in the form of the man from Galilee we call Jesus, we no longer need to live in the darkness of the night.

I've told you before about our Personnel 'Bunker' we constructed during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm during the first Gulf War. If you remember, I confessed we Personnel troops were a bit naive regarding how to build a good solid bunker. Plus, we might have been a tad bit lazy when it came to filling the many sandbags it required to build a full size bunker. So, we decided to build our bunker only tall enough to crawl into. There were about 15 of us on duty at any given time and when we needed to get to our bunker we had to get down on


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our hands and knees and crawl in. Then you had to actually lay down and roll to the farthest end. When we were all inside it must have looked like a giant human cigar box. Other squadrons built their bunkers tall enough that everyone could just walk right in, but we were far too busy to do that much sandbag filling... As I was thinking about these words of hope from the prophet Isaiah and the promise of a baby to be our savior, I began to think how it felt inside that human cigar box. When we practiced, it was kind of a joke. The other units with their big bunkers laughed at us and called it our Personnel Coffin. We laughed it off too, until that night when the scud missiles hit our base and the surrounding communities. I remember the commander of the Security Forces Squadron guaranteeing us the Patriot Missile defense systems would knock down anything the enemy could launch against us. I trusted Lt Col Pack and believed we were safe. He was, after all just giving us a word of hope so we wouldn't be overly frightened by the threat of those scud missiles. Then the missiles hit, and it became real. From inside our Personnel cigar box, you could feel the shaking of the earth and the reverberations of the explosions. At that moment I lost my hope, at least in Col Pack's promise of protection from the missiles. A feeling of despair and hopelessness overcame me and I lay there unable to move or do anything to alter my future. I literally was hopeless to change whatever was coming and I certainly no longer trusted the promise made by the Security Forces Commander.

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Almost everyone experiences times when they feel helpless if not hopeless. People in both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah were facing many hopeless situations. Political unrest and the constant threat of war were persistent problems. Sickness was rampant and hunger was an ever-present reality. We've seen hopelessness and despair in the aftermaths of hurricanes, in the pain and suffering caused by earthquakes and wildfires. The smog from the out-of-control fires in Canada have many people thinking about the Apocalypse. The economy, inflation, crime on the rise, and even the scarcity of items on the shelves of our store all eats away at our hope and we feel helpless to change our situation.

History has shown we can get through just about any circumstance, if we have hope. The prophet Isaiah foresees great things happening for the people of his day. In verse four he says that the "rod of their oppressors" will be broken. The next verse talks about the joy at the end of conflict and war. At the end of his message, Isaiah reveals how all of this will take place.


I know a little about the joy at the end of a war.  (SLIDE) Here I am getting off the plane at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. Trust me, after the helplessness and hopelessness of that tiny, dark Personnel Bunker, and seeing all those people greeting us as we returned to Langley, I felt the joy of war's end...

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(**SLIDE**) There is a light at the end of the tunnel of our despair

and it's not a train coming to mow us down. Jesus, the light of the world is foretold by the prophet Isaiah and this promise is the source of hope for all people who are living in darkness. Isaiah says, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Our hope is not in those in charge over us or even in missile defense batteries designed to protect us from incoming enemy aircraft and missiles. Our hope isn't found in a more secure, better paying job, in a nice car, or even in a fine home. Hope isn't being inside a bunker you can stand up in or even in a bunker built by slackers. Rather, it is God's presence in our lives and in our world that makes the difference.

Isaiah's message to the people of Israel in his day and time was that God will use a person to change their mourning into dancing.  (**SLIDE**) For the people of that time, it was the birth of a king—probably Josiah or Hezekiah, scholars aren't in agreement on which king is being foretold in this scripture. Some 500 or so years later, after the resurrection of Jesus, the Church has taken these verses and applied them to Jesus Christ. Certainly, Jesus has saved us from lives lived apart from God and has provided us with new relationships with God. Jesus is the light that no darkness can overcome.

We have seen how God uses people to bring hope and help time and time again. Not only have we seen how God uses other people during times of disaster,

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but God has also used this congregation to do things none of us could have ever imagined nor been able to accomplish on our own.



(**SLIDE**) We've

come together to raise money for victims of flooding after storms, for wildfire victims of previous fires, and to help refugees fleeing the war in the Ukraine.

Think about the hope your prayer quilts bring to those who need something to cling to during their long nights of despair or the hope your felt blankets bring to youth at Wernle who, in many cases have had the hope ripped out of their souls.

Your acts of kindness just might be the one thing keeping someone hanging onto a thin and fraying thread of hope. Thank you for being one of the ones God is using today to spread God's message of Hope into a very dark and oppressed world!

If you are in a hopeless situation, let me play the role of the prophet Isaiah and assure you there is hope, even for you. God is with you. You can place your trust in God and rest in God's love. Rejoicing in the hope that is yours, I would challenge you to do something "crazy" even in the middle of your own difficult situation. Look for someone for whom you can be both help and hope. God will always take care of you and God is calling you to bring light to someone's darkness. My experience has been that when we focus on bringing hope to someone else in their troubles, our own troubles fade to the background until they disappear altogether and the thing we used to think of as trouble has turned into the catalyst for moving us into a whole new adventure.

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Now go back to Saudi Arabia with me... In the darkness of our little, very bleak, low-rider bunker, it was hard to remember that Jesus is with us everywhere. Those ground shattering explosions we heard and felt from our Personnel Coffin did do their damage. One Scud Missile hit near our aircraft and damaged one F-15. I have a piece of that scud missile with me today if you want to look at it... The other scud that night hit an apartment building a few miles from the base. That apartment was filled with Army Soldiers who had just arrived in-country and were waiting to be sent north into Kuwait. That Army unit took over 120 casualties from that single scud missile. For the survivors, and the families of those soldiers, even though their loved one and comrade in arms gave their earthly lives for their country, they can have peace because of the promise of this son given to us, Jesus Christ. In fact, all of us who have lost loved ones can be assured of that same promise of the peace of Christ even in the midst of our present suffering.

The son that was promised to the people of Israel so long ago still lives and invites you into the blessed hope of the resurrection. May you too receive that hope and the peace of Christ in the midst of whatever difficult situations you face.



(SLIDE) May the one called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace surround us protect us, and give us hope, amen.