



What gives you hope?

What are the things you look forward to doing or having? What places do you anticipate going?

Last Christmas, I was waiting with eager expectation for the visit of family. It was going to be the first Christmas in several years that we would be able to enjoy my wife's family for Christmas. Her parents aren't the typical dreaded In-Laws, and her brother and his wife are good friends. In anticipation we got a nice Christmas tree and put colored lights on it because it would make visiting Floridians feel at home.

Jack Frost and Old Man Winter also showed up for the Christmas gathering, bringing with them a huge snow and ice storm two days before Christmas. The landscape was brilliant and stunning. The house was cold with out electricity. There was no running water or toilets that flushed. There was no stove, microwave, computer, TV, lights (on the Christmas tree or otherwise), no heat and the house was full of lifelong Floridians. Was Christmas ruined? Well, it was an adventure that would last for almost ten days.

Early on in the power outage, I went out 4-wheeling with my Father-In-Law into town which is 30 minutes away when the roads are not snow covered. We were off getting survival supplies. We brought some heat to the house with a propane heater. We brought beanie weenies to life for Christmas dinner with a propane-powered camping stove. Our Amish neighbors were not without contribution as they loaned us a propane lantern. Our neighbors also gave us water from their springhouse after we grew weary of melting snow over the camping stove so we could have water to drink and flush the toilets.

Our cat Mousey did enjoy that our front porch became our freezer. She feasted on fillet of fish. For the rest of us however, we were glad when our winter adventure was over and life could get back to normal. I now understand why producers take the *Survivor* show to warm places. My wife's Father promised he would never come up here again in the winter and has so far made good on his promise.

Where is your hope when the electricity goes out in your life? What do you do when plans fail, or people disappoint you? What do you do when you disappoint yourself? Complaining will not change things. Trust me, I know. God knows our despair even better



Are you in Despair?

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?

Isaiah was writing to God's people who felt abandoned by God. "Where is God when I need Him?! Why doesn't He lift a finger to help me," the people protested.

In their despair, God wanted His people to remember how He had treated them in times past. The names Jacob and Israel were well known to the people who were complaining about the apparent raw deal they were receiving from God.

Jacob was mean, selfish, and deceptive, even on one of his good days. He fought and argued with God. Jacob's struggle was spiritual, as well as physical. Jacob did not defeat God, but he finally submitted to God. God blessed him and changed his name to Israel which means to confront God. The Bible says that God loved Jacob.

Does that surprise you? God loved a person who was a scoundrel. God loved a person who argued with Him. God met with Jacob and gave him hope as He blessed him. Was he deserving? ...No way! And no one is deserving of God's blessing and promise of hope. That's the point. You can't earn hope, but God will give it to you if you ask. He will change your despair into hope. Listen to these verses from 1 Peter chapter 1.

³ 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...

²¹ Through him [Jesus] you believe in God, who raised him [Jesus] from the dead and glorified him [Jesus], and so your faith and hope are in God.

So, God in His kindness, on His own initiative, has sent Jesus to give you hope. The hope in Him is not automatic, but given to those who believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and confess their sins to Him. The Bible states that if you are at odds with Christ, that you have no hope and are without God (Ephesians 2:12-13). Where do you stand?

Many people placed much hope in the "indestructible" bulwark we know as the Titanic. I read an article this week that shows two pieces of the Titanic's hull were found a third of a mile from the deep watery grave of the main ship. Researchers say that means that the "unsinkable" ship sank faster than originally thought. Probably, in only about 20 minutes.

Where do you look for hope? If it's anywhere but in Jesus Christ it will sink like the Titanic, with you on board.

Some on the luxury liner were rescued from the dark cold waters off the coast of Newfoundland. The lifeboats saved them. Jesus is your lifeboat as your life is sinking away. He is also an anchor in the storms of life. The Bible speaks about those who put their trust in the lifeboat of Christ.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Hebrews 6:19

Is your soul firm and secure? Christ is the anchor in life's storms.



ave you considered God's Greatness?

²⁸ 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.

Many children learn a prayer that states that, "God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food. Even one of Hollywood's more recent movies about God, *Bruce Almighty*, shows God to be great and powerful. However, the god of the movie has grown tired and wants Bruce to take over while He goes on vacation.

As you consider God's greatness, know that the Bible claims God to be the Creator. God is the one who created over 100 billion stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. Scientists looking through the Hubble telescope believe that there are hundreds of billions of galaxies. The scope of something so large is mind boggling.

God also works on the small scale such as the human eye and the bacteria flagellum. "The bacteria flagellum?", you say. Much has been written and discussed by Christians and by those who do not profess Christ, as it presents an evolutionary puzzle.

The flagellum is a complex machine like a motor. Its propulsion system is irreducibly complex. If any part of it is removed, the system's function is destroyed. To say it has evolved is a massive scientific leap of faith. Irreducible complexity in organisms, or in machines, indicates they were designed, rather than having evolved.

How, then, could this system emerge in a gradual evolutionary fashion, if function is only achieved when all of the required parts are available? This is the question that has turned some staunch evolutionists to confess that intelligent design is a better conclusion. The next step is to acknowledge that the God of the Bible is the Creator of the bacteria flagellum, complex organisms, and our entire world and universe.

God's greatness is even more than His power and creative ability. In addition, He is close to His people, loves them, and cares for them. This is the connotation of LORD. It is used more than any other name for Him in the Bible. He is not a distant dad, but involved. He's not so busy running things that He has no time for His kids. I heard that even a busy executive like Mr. Tyson, of Tyson's Chicken, would accept calls from his kids even in an important business meeting. God is the same way and is a multi-tasking guru. He is not too busy running the universe to have time for you.



ave you ever wanted to have your battery charged?

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ 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.

Are you weary? Are you failing under the pressures of life? The LORD will give you durability and stability. Don't feel badly because you're not alone. Even the bulldozer personality of the apostle Paul did not make him immune to weaknesses in his life. Do you know what God told him? He told him the same thing He tells you and me.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Do you boast about your weaknesses? Most people don't. However, when you put on a façade of strength and self sufficiency you may fool others and you may even fool yourself, but you will not fool God. Why not admit to God that you have needs before you come crashing down and make an even bigger fool of yourself. The "survivor mentality" is popular, but faulty. It's okay to admit needs because even young men in prime physical condition get tired and lose strength.

Notice the word hope in verse 31. It is a hope that waits. Try this on: "Those who wait on the LORD will renew their strength." If you get something immediately you do not have to wait or hope that you will get it.

I can only imagine what it would be like to go Christmas shopping with my daughters and give them presents immediately. They would point. I'd buy and hand it to them. They would play. Then Christmas day would come and they'd be disappointed. "Daddy, we don't have anything new to play with. "We're bored". Oh, those dreaded words!

Instead, my wife and I buy presents and the kids must wait for Christmas. They wait with eager expectation and trust that we have stuff for them. God has given us promises and we must wait with eager expectation. "Not fair," you say. Well, God

wants us to have our hope in the right place. Waiting develops trust and affection for God. Our hope is not in just what God will give us, but in **God Himself**.

We are to set our hearts and minds on things above and not on the passing things that we can see, and touch.

Earlier Isaiah wrote, *This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.* (Isaiah 30:15)

We do not receive strength and hope from the Lord because we trust our own strength and we misplace our hope. We can be like mighty eagles. When their upper beak grows over their lower they can not eat and must live on only what they can drink, and thus become weak. They can go and break off the hindering portion of their upper beak against a rock, resume eating, and be restored to strength.

When you break off those things that make you weak, and turn to the Lord he will renew your strength.

My cell phone is in continual need of recharging. When the battery is low, I am not able to enjoy the phone for fear I will not be able to send or receive an important call. It has to wait for the charger, but when the battery is fully charged I can enjoy the phone. It is waiting upon the LORD that recharges your battery.

If you're in despair and in need of hope, and a recharge, Jesus Christ is who you need to look to for lasting hope. Why not ask Him to provide what you need?

Thank you for reading.
I'd like to invite you to come and hear the next
message in person,
And to join us in singing Christmas songs.
After the message, there will be hot chocolate and
cookies for you to enjoy.
~ Pastor Bryan ~