

“Hope”

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Kurt Cobain was the lead singer of legendary grunge band *Nirvana*. He tragically took his own life in an act of suicide. Despite his widespread fame, great wealth and adulation as a rock star he grew terribly lonely and depressed. In the days leading up to his suicide one of his diary entries read: "Somebody, anybody, God help, help me please. I want to be accepted...I'm so tired of crying and dreaming, I'm soo soo alone." (Source: Charles Cross, *Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*. Reported in *Rolling Stone* magazine, November 2001)

It is impossible for some to appreciate the depth of despair that washes over an individual for a prolonged period of time that would drive them to take their own life. In such cases, there is no need for us to judge them seeing they have already judged themselves. Their self judgment produced a verdict of guilt and they sentenced themselves to death.

Almost all people everywhere have stress and are confronted with varying levels of discouragement. At times, these things can escalate to the point of driving people to despair and depression. We are sometimes under the false impression that once we believe in Christ, everything in the present will turn out alright and our life's circumstances will be better. Unfortunately, this is simply not true. If, however, this is not true, then what earthly difference does knowing Jesus Christ make?

This is an honest question and it demands an honest answer. When Jesus Christ began His earthly ministry He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath in Nazareth where He had been brought up. He opened up the scroll and He read Isaiah 61:1.

Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Consider what He said. Jesus Christ brings "good news" to the poor. He proclaims release to the captives. He brings recovery of sight to the blind. And He sets free those who are oppressed. Where on this list do you and I fall? Are we poor? Are we held in captivity? Are we blind? Are we oppressed? Absolutely! What then does Jesus Christ bring to me in this present life?

What Jesus Christ brings to me in this present life is hope! I am confident that in this life I will have tribulation but I am to take courage because Jesus Christ has overcome the world (Jn 16:33).

Jesus never promised to change my circumstances, but He has changed me and He has changed my destiny. Friend, this is hope with a capital "H". When the apostle Paul had been beaten with many blows, placed in chains, and thrown into a dark prison cell, he was able to raise up his voice and sing praises to God (Acts 16:22-25). And why was this possible? It was possible because of hope.

We must never forget that our present sufferings can never be compared with the glory that is awaiting us (Rom 8:18). Is it possible for us in the midst of our trying circumstances to stay the course, to hold fast, and not to despair? Absolutely and how is such perseverance possible?

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Listen carefully to Galatians 5:1, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Read this slowly and think on the grace in which you presently stand.

Think about what Paul has to tell us in 2 Timothy 4:9-18.

⁹ "Make every effort to come to me soon; ¹⁰ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. ¹² But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.

¹⁶ At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. ¹⁷ **But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me**, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Tim. 4:9-18)

Even a casual reading allows us to hear in Paul's voice despair and victory, discouragement and triumph. How is this possible? It is possible because of hope.

Friend, we have hope, and His name is Jesus. Let me conclude with this story.

"As Vice President, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband." (Gary Thomas, in *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994, p. 26.)

To those who are perishing the word of the cross is foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Let those who reject the cross mock us. Let us gladly accept the accusations of being simpletons and childish, but I for one will most assuredly die with hope rather than live with despair. We have all we need in Jesus Christ. May you find great comfort knowing Him.