

Hope In A Turbulent World

Our Hope Must Be in God

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 28-Aug-10; Sermon #1008

II Peter 1:15-18 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

He is talking about the Transfiguration, and when it occurred. What I want to pick up on here for this sermon is Peter's statement in verse 16: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I am going to take you back in time for a little bit here and ask you, "Of what value were the Greek and Roman myths?" Were they fables? Were they truths? I ask this partly because they continue to be read to this day, and it very likely that all of us at some time or another in our life read one or two of them. On many occasions we were introduced to them quite early in life through a school assignment, or perhaps even a movie.

In the past six months, Hollywood released the movie "Clash of the Titans," which was loosely based on a major event among the Greek myths. Some of us have read all or portions of Homer's *Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*, and both of which have mythical qualities to them.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines a myth as: "A traditional story dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes that informed or shaped the world view of a people as by explaining aspects of the natural world or delineating the customs or ideals of society." That proves at first to be quite a mouthful. You really have to tear that statement apart to get at the heart of what he is talking about there.

I am going to give you the 19th century British author and critic John Ruskin's simpler definition. "A myth is a story with a meaning attached to it other than it seems to have at first, and in fact that it has such a meaning is generally marked by some of its circumstances being extraordinary or in the common use of the word 'unnatural.'"

Now I am going to give you a third, even simpler definition I got from *The New Testament Commentary*, page 24, on II Peter 1. "A myth is a story which man has formulated to express his own desires without any reference to reality."

As we begin, I want you to understand this. I know you know this is true, and this is a reminder: God is, and what He says is reality.

Now Ruskin used the term "extraordinary" and "unnatural" to describe circumstances contained within the myths. They were of course, what we would call today "supernatural." Perhaps this will help illustrate. Regarding Greek mythology, you may have heard of Pegasus. Pegasus was a magical, winged, flying horse ridden by the hero, Perseus.

In the myth, Pegasus miraculously sprang from the neck of Medusa when she was beheaded during a life and death struggle with Perseus. She was a bad gal. You did not want to let her look at you because you froze into a statue when she looked at you; so he had to fight her without looking at her. It was quite an epic battle. He had to give her a backhand with the sword, which he did do, and when he cut off her head, Pegasus sprang out of her neck. This illustrates what Ruskin meant by "extraordinary" and "unnatural."

Although the myths were of course not true, they were, at the same time, not without value because they taught the Greeks and Romans concepts that helped them to hold to their unconverted cultures in what they believed. This is why Ruskin said that they had meaning other than what first appeared. They were an attempt by a variety of authors through the centuries to explain why things in life were as they were. An example theme might be, "Why is life so difficult?" Another would be, "Why are some people successful, and others are not?"

One of the more interesting myths is the one concerning Pandora's Box. The myth concerns the subject of today's sermon. Sometimes things became mixed up through the centuries, but I will try to hold this one story together so that you will get at least a sense of it. Pandora's name is revealing. In Greek, the prefix "pan-" means "all." We use it in the English language by naming things like "Pan-American Airways." They flew all over the Americas. Now "dora" means "gift," and thus her name literally means "giver of all gifts." Some say that it means "all endowed"; that is, that Pandora was greatly gifted by the gods.

Pandora had a secondary name. Anesidora was her secondary name, and it means, "she who sends up gifts," implying that she sent them to heaven from earth. Interesting. In Greek mythology, she is the first woman—a sort of a parallel of Eve—and when Zeus, the highest of the gods, ordered her created by Hephaestus, he told him to make her of earth, which of course Eve was—made of the earth you might say—because she came out of Adam, who *was* of the earth. She was to be a beautiful form of punishment for Prometheus stealing fire (another myth here) and giving it to men.

The sculptures and artists generally depict Pandora as being very beautiful. Once created, Zeus then commanded that the other gods give her gifts. In the oldest story, no mention is made of how she came into possession of a jar with a lid. (Incidentally, "box" is wrong because there was a mistranslation. It was a jar with a lid.) That jar contained all the evils which now afflict mankind. Now except for plagues and diseases, no other evils are specified; however, it is generally accepted that all evils are intended by those so named.

Here is where the myth really gets intriguing, because the stories show that Pandora did not open the lid of the jar out of malice in order to deliberately afflict mankind. She is portrayed in the myth as not being mean-spirited. She opened it out of simple curiosity to see what was inside, because when given the jar she was not told what was inside, and her action in opening it was a sort of "curiosity killed the cat" affair.

She was not killed, but in opening the lid of the jar, everything inside, except for one thing, escaped, and thus the afflictions mankind now bear up under are on us. When she realized what was happening by her taking off the lid, she jammed the lid back on again, but what was it that did not escape? This is intriguing, because what she trapped inside was hope.

Now, did the Greeks mean by this that hope—the kind mankind usually has—is a false hope, an empty hope, because it is founded on nothing solid? Is it in reality an affliction—an *evil* affliction? Or did the Greeks mean that since hope was just imprisoned in the jar, that mankind is utterly hopeless because all things that cause afflictions are free to roam at will against mankind with nothing to mitigate them?

Or did the Greeks mean by this that mankind should expectantly look forward to some day hope being released from the jar to do its good work in behalf of mankind, thus mitigating the works of the evil afflictions? Nobody knows for certain, because the Greeks do not give the answer either. But this is the best that the mass of mankind has available, because Pandora later opened the jar again, and she allowed hope to escape.

In real life, modern philosophers attempted to find whether having hope is a positive or a negative. How much of God's Word the Greeks had is unknown. I just said to you, or made the remark that Romans 1 says that mankind is "without excuse" for at least knowing there is a Creator God, and so the Greeks had that available to them, and it is fairly certain that at least time-wise, when the Greeks were writing these myths, that the books of Moses were available.

It is also fairly certain that the Greeks had available to them histories passed down by word-of-mouth from generation to generation of the creation, the period before the Flood, the Flood itself, and the gathering of mankind to the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and then the centralizing of mankind under human rulers. So we can begin by thinking that at least some truths were available to them, and that this was their means of passing at least something on to their people even though it was all screwed up.

Now listen to this. The majority opinion among modern scholars is that hope is good. It is a mitigating quality that overall gives right positive value, but some philosophers are strongly opposed. The German philosopher, Nietzsche, concluded that hope is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment. To him all hope is empty and false. Of course, he is dead now.

Then there is Emily Dickinson. Some of you may have read some of her poetry. She said in a poem that "hope is a feathered thing." By this she meant that hope is similar to a bird, that when one reaches out to catch it, it flies away. She had a rather empty view of it as well.

Simply stated, hope is the expectation of good results. Now how important is hope to our life in Christ? Let us go to one of the most famous well-known verses in all of the Bible:

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul penned these immortal words that one commentator I referenced called faith, hope, and love "an eternal trinity." We will find out more why he called it that a little bit later. He meant that these three factors are needed continuously throughout life without end. They are in fact the three building

blocks to a successful life in Christ. Now whether considered separately or together, they are inextricably tied to our relationship with God. These are the qualities that make us function correctly, regardless of circumstances.

You might want to think of them in this way. We are God's invention. He made us, and as our manufacturer, He designs us to function and produce. Cars function best on gasoline. Other means produce some results, but nothing has been found to compare with gasoline.

In life, we function best on a combination of these three. We *always* need faith. We *always* need hope. We *always* need love. It is these three qualities that best support us in all circumstances. It is these three virtues that give us strength to function, grow, and endure as God intends.

Every human being who is living, or who has ever lived, functions on some combination of qualities, but only faith, hope, and love that comes from God. People may have faith, they may have hope, and they may have love, but not all faith, hope, and love comes from God. What Paul is writing of here is faith, hope, and love that has its source in a relationship with God above, and no other faith, hope, and love will do. If we have it, and we are using it, it enables us to fulfill the responsibilities God gives to us, and we can be made into the image of Jesus Christ.

Let us go back to II Peter 1 once again. I am going to read to you what Peter had to say about hope.

II Peter 1:2-11 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now completely disconnected from the commentator that named faith, hope, and love the "eternal trinity," there are others who say that the basic subject of the General Epistles—meaning James, Peter, and John—is faith, hope, and love. James' theme is faith. Peter's theme is hope, and John's theme is love.

I am not saying that possessing these three qualities makes the trials of life go away. The pressure of trials is a vital part of life. Trials test us, and God, as He did with Abraham, wants to see what our reaction is going to be.

Let us flip all the way back to the book of Deuteronomy. This is so plain, using the Israelites as an example.

Deuteronomy 8:1-3 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

God states clearly that He created trials for the Israelites to face because He wanted to see what was in their hearts. He wanted to see, that when the pressure was on, whether they would continue to believe Him and still do what He said regardless of their discomfort. He made it hard on them.

Trials force decisions. He also wanted to see whether they were learning, and of course us now, whether we really know that man does not live by bread alone. We must live by faith. Trials can be very beneficial by greatly enhancing the quality of the product God is creating.

We are going to leave here and go all the way back to the book of James. We are jumping from one end of the Bible to the other. That just goes to show you that what is at the beginning connects with what is at the end.

James mentions trials too. We tend to not like trials, but James says:

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

It is clearly counseled to consider trials as a reason for joy. I do not know that I have ever jumped up and down and said, "Boy, I've got another trial! Isn't that wonderful?" The reaction is always to turn in and say, "Woe is me!" Maybe we do not go quite that far, but we really do not jump for joy. It shows how far we are from being totally one with God. He said, "This is for your good, son. You are going to go through it."

The reason is not for the trial per se. The reason is because the trials are capable of producing good results. It must be understood that trials do not automatically produce good results. They can go quite bitter rather than better, and whether one becomes better for the experience largely depends upon whether and to what degree a Christian is motivated by faith, hope, and love that comes from God.

James is describing a person surrounded by the trials of mankind, and his concern here is whether they produce perseverance. You will see that I changed the word. The KJV says "patience." The NKJV says "patience" as well. I believe that both of those places should have been translated into "perseverance," and that is because the Greek word underlying the word "patience" used here is better translated "endurance," "perseverance," or "steadfastness."

The reason I said that is because the English word "patience" tends to indicate passivity, but the context here in no way indicates passivity. The Greek word used under that word "patience" is *hupomone* [*hoop-om-on-ay*]. It is *Strong's* #5281. You can look there, and it says that word indicates constancy, steadfastness; not passivity.

The Presbyterian commentator, William Barclay, describes the word as "having the quality to stand, facing the storm, struggling against difficulty and opposition." It is not just standing there taking it, but going forward against it. It is a quality making progress rather than merely waiting out a difficulty.

James focused on the testing of the quality of our belief and trust. My focus though is on hope that is derived from and linked to faith as being a motivator to sustain the struggle against the difficulties of life.

Peter did not mention hope in his paragraph that we read earlier, but he did mention endurance. Peter used exactly the same word James did, and that too is better translated as "perseverance." It is one who is moving forward, persevering against the difficulty, rather than passively just letting it occur. Virtually every modern translation renders it perseverance, endurance, or steadfastness.

Now understand this truth. There is no active steadfastness unless one is actually attempting to accomplish something and has the expectation of good to come from what one is doing. Passive patience does nothing but wait. Yes, there is waiting involved, but what God wants is a waiting that is moving forward in hope of expectation of good. It is conquering the trial, not merely just sitting there letting it happen.

I Peter 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What does the reference to Christ's resurrection do? Well, it is the guarantee that God gives so that His Word is backed up by something we know occurred. He wants us to note that even though Christ submitted to God's will perfectly, He died. What does that mean to you and me? It should mean, that though we suffer, it does not mean we are failing.

Peter knew that people would surely say, "What good did His obedience do for Him?" The answer is that He was resurrected in order to give us assurance that our hope is in God even when everything seems to be against us. Now learn this: immediate circumstances in our life do not dictate to God's faithfulness, and that is why we can have hope, because even if we die, He has the power to resurrect. We are seeking something bigger than merely getting through the trial.

When we enter all three qualities that are named in I Corinthians 13:13, we can understand that what the philosophers say regarding hope that they evaluate is that they are not far from wrong, because the hope we have is a very special hope that is not generally available to mankind.

Watch these scriptures unfold. These are familiar scriptures, but I just want to pick out one thing of each one of these that is very important to you and me. Turn first to Ephesians 2. Let us do a little bit of analyzing.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

Grace is most certainly God's gift, and we can all agree on that; but so is faith. They are linked—one without the other neither would exist. Is not the faith of which God speaks His gift given to those to whom He reveals Himself? Now a little bit of an analysis, because, yes it is. It is the faith that God gives, and how many in the world are given that gift? The Bible answers that: only those He calls.

Let us go to Romans 5. This time the subject switches from faith to hope.

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The subject here is not hope, but love. We jump from faith to love. Is not the love of which God speaks in this verse that love which is shed abroad in our hearts, only given to those who are justified and reconciled to Him? Just like the faith, the only ones who get that love are those God calls and are now working in. So the love of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians 13:13 is the love of God, which certainly did not begin with us. It too is a gift of God.

Let us go to II Thessalonians 2. Paul again is the author.

II Thessalonians 2:16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation [encouragement] and good hope by grace. . .

The same factors are involved in the hope of which Paul writes. It is available only to those who know God, and is given by Him. How many in the world actually do know Him in that way? Again, it is only those to whom He has revealed Himself by His calling.

Notice that Paul says of this specific encouragement and hope that it is *given*, and it is good. This is a recognition, that in some respects, the Greeks and modern philosophers are right. Most of the hopes of this world are false, and their fruits are sorrow and disappointment. Their hopes are based on political systems, on more money, on greater power, on better weather, and better health, and so on and so forth.

The reality is that the term "hope" is used in a very careless way, and that kind of hope is nothing more than wishful thinking that has little to it to make it solidly trustworthy. We casually say things like, "I hope it doesn't rain," and whether it does or does not is not really all that meaningful.

With a similar usage in hundreds of minor circumstances, the hope which God gives and desires that we use has solid reasons within God's purpose for His preparing us for His Kingdom, and in His purpose we have consistent need for the perseverance and steadfastness in the faith, because we *will* be tested. He wants to find out what we are made of, and whether we are really going to be loyal to Him. The hope that God gives provides the proper assurance, and there is a reason why.

Now notice this next verse. Everybody knows this one.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

That word "substance" is translated from the Greek word *hupostasis*. It is *Strong's* #5287. It literally means "standing under." Faith stands under what we hope for. In other words, faith is a support or a foundation for what we hope for in terms of *God's* purpose. The entire chapter is showing how faith supported what those named in the chapter hoped for. Did you ever look at it that way? Those are illustrations.

Abraham and Sarah hoped for someone to inherit, and faith stood under. That was the foundation of their hope, and so they never gave up hope because their faith was solid. The same is true of Joseph. The same is true of Abraham. The same is true of David, and all of those. They all had faith standing under what they hoped to be completed in their lifetime.

We all saw just a bit earlier that faith, hope, and love are all gifts of God. Faith is the foundation for both of the others. Without faith the other two would not exist. It supplies the support or basis for hope and love to operate from.

If we do not really believe that God is, and we really do not believe in what God says, what is there to hope for? It makes our hope hollow. What encouragement are we going to get from that? These people in chapter 11 operated on all three of them. They had faith in God. They hoped that He was going to come through, and it was good and solid, and so they returned Him love. They did what He said, and that is how they returned the love.

So, we saw earlier that faith, hope, and love were gifts of God. Faith is the foundation for both to operate from, and as shown by Paul, it is love that is the greatest because of what it accomplishes. People can believe and have hope, but if these are not acted upon, nothing happens. Love for God and man is the action that God intends to be produced by faith and hope.

Love is what one does that is truly beneficial for the self and others as defined by God. It is love in action that more than the other two moves toward oneness with God in kind, attitude, and character. But all three are linked as if by a chain, and they work together, and all work by means of a foundation of truth. Brethren, this is not a fable. It is truth.

Now here is a truth that is important for us to understand.

Hebrews 12:1-11 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance [*hupomone*] the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening [discipline] of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what

son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This illustration from Jesus' life touches on an aspect of His life important to us to understand. Recall that hope was directly mentioned in Hebrews 11:1. It is not mentioned again through the entire chapter, but it is not forgotten because hope was very important to the people written of in Hebrews and used as illustrations.

In addition to that, if you understand at least the story-flow of the entire book of Hebrews, you will know it was written to a people who were drifting away from God's way of life. The author of Hebrews is implying, with each example given in Hebrews 11 of the people named, was that they accomplished because their faith and hope was given of God, and that sustained them through each difficulty that they faced. But it was not until chapter 11 was over that the author hits the greatest trial and the greatest illustration of his theme. In the first two verses he mentions "endurance," "perseverance," or "steadfastness" two times. He was pointing to the life of Jesus Christ, and our hope, like Jesus', cannot be fleeting. It must be steadfast because we are not involved in a 100-yard dash. The full realization of our hope is yet future, and we must continuously be sustained as He was.

God expects growth from the point of our receiving His Spirit so He can provide us with sufficient time. Evelyn and I have been at this now for fifty years. We must have had an awful lot to overcome! But every one of us, brethren, is running a marathon. Israel's marathon through the wilderness lasted forty years.

This morning I just happened to think of this. How long would it take a person to walk from the Nile River to Jerusalem? I figured probably a strong young man, just walking, could do it in 2 weeks' time. It is not all that far. It took them 40 years to get across that wilderness. Why did it take so long? Because of all the tests God gave to them! Just to cross the Sinai desert was nothing. It was all the tests they had to go through before they got there so that they would be prepared to go into the land and rule over it; and then when they got into the land, they let Him down and did not follow through on what He said to do. A few did. Out of the 2-3 million or so people who left Egypt, how many actually made it, who had the faith and the hope and the love for God to keep on going? It was only two men, and probably their families: Joshua and Caleb.

Do you have any idea how great what it is that God wants to give us? It is not going cheaply. It took the life of our Creator to be able to give it to us, and it takes our life given to Him in going through the trials He arranges for us to go through so that we are prepared to do what the Israelites did not do. So often, brethren, we discount the gifts that God has given to us, and we lose track of why the difficulties we go through are so great, and why it is we need faith, hope, and love in order to get there. Well, God supplies us with what we need. The problem is, are we going to use it in order to be prepared to be there? I sure hope so.

I said earlier that our hope cannot be fleeting. It must be steadfast. We have got to keep on seeking love, one foot right after the other, one step right after the other. God's purpose is that we be trained

by life's experiences, and if we bail out brethren, it is over. There is no way that somebody who bails out of a race can win.

We need faith, hope, and love continuously, and that is why that man said it is an "eternal trinity." The Greek word Paul used there for "abide" in "these three abide" is *meno*. It is *Strong's* #3306. It literally means, "to stay in a given place; a state or relation or expectancy without turning aside, without moving on." It means, "to continue, to endure, to remain, or stand," and thus "abide" too indicates constancy, steadfastness in going on. Its meaning is partly why the commentator used that term.

The hope in this world fades and it disappoints. In contrast, why can this hope that we have been given be eternal and always encouraging, and always gives? Well, I am going to give you the key. It is actually very simple. It is because of Whom we believe, Whom the hope is vested in, and Whom we love. These three again are linked.

Did you notice that I did not say it is because of what our hope is in? Or another way of putting it, what we hope *for*? I can almost guarantee that if you ask what our hope is in, most of us are going to say it is in the resurrection of the dead. We want to make it. That of course is not entirely wrong, but in reality it is getting the cart before the horse. More important than the promises is the One *making* the promises.

If Joe Blow—your neighbor down the street—promises that if you follow him, "I will resurrect you from the dead," do you really believe it? How good is his word? What guarantee can he give? What could he offer you as a resumé for what he has accomplished?

If another neighbor who is a world-famous Christian evangelist says to you, "Follow me, and I will resurrect you from the dead," you might be more inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt because at least he seems to be in that line of work. His qualifications appear to be higher than the auto mechanic you came in contact with before.

But let us look, first of all, at Job. I will ask you, if God says, "Follow Me and I will resurrect you," and then provides a demonstration by resurrecting Jesus Christ, you have something pretty solid to hope for in this. He has already demonstrated that He can do it. He did not just resurrect Jesus Christ; He resurrected a lot of other people besides at the same time. During His ministry, Jesus Christ resurrected Lazarus, and He resurrected another two children that came in contact with Him. So He has a resumé that includes proof. Do we believe it?

In Job 8 we have a comment, not from Job, but from Bildad.

Job 8:13-15 So are the paths of all who forget God; and the hope of the hypocrite shall perish, whose confidence shall be cut off, and whose trust is a spider's web. [How much weight does a spider's web hold?] He leans on his house, but it does not stand. He holds it fast, but it does not endure.

Now Bildad, just by observation, could see that people were hoping in things that were not worth hoping for. What he is getting at here in the story is, "Job, your hope had better be in God, because otherwise, there is no hope." The hypocrite most certainly does not have a relationship with God, and so his hope cannot be in God. He does not have a sure hope.

Let us go to Job 31. This time it is Job who is speaking.

Job 31:24-25 "If I have made gold my hope, or said to fine gold, 'You are my confidence'; if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gained much. . .

Drop down now to verse 28. Listen to what he concludes.

Job 31:28 This also would be an iniquity deserving of judgment, for I would have denied God who is above.

Job was affirming that his hope was indeed in God, and therefore it was right and it was good, and that all other hopes are not worth trusting in. But he said something rather chilling there, and let us be instructed. He said, "If my hope was in something other than God, that would be iniquity." That is kind of chilling. How often have we put our hopes in something besides God? Minor occasions of this are not bad, but in this case it was something that was very important.

Let that verse be a lead-in to what it says in many, many psalms, because the psalms get right to the heart of the matter, and they say things that are important for us to understand.

Psalms 31:13 For I hear the slander of many; fear is on every side. . . .

David had a lot of enemies. The man in the top spot is easy to take pot-shots at, and he is admitting that he feared. He feared for his life probably often.

Psalms 31:13-15 . . . While they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life. But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies.

Psalms 31:19-20 Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

Psalms 31:23-24 Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

That is very plain. Now let us go to Psalm 38.

Psalms 38:15 For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.

Psalms 39:7 "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.

Are you getting the point? Our hope must be in God.

Psalms 42:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

Psalm 42:11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

I think I could probably go on all day long with the psalms—(Well, that is an exaggeration.) and we would find David and other psalmists expressing that their hope is in a personality. It is in a Being. It is in God. Sure, we hope for the promises we get, but their real hope is in God, because it is God who makes the promises worth anything.

Psalm 71:5 For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth.

Psalm 71:14 But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more.

And on it goes. I could go on just reading the statements that our hope must be in God. Now why does God put this in His Word so frequently? Well, it is really very simple, because any promise given is only as valid, as trustworthy as the integrity and faithfulness of the giver to make his promise good.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had hopes. Everyone with a somewhat normal mind who has ever lived has the capacity for hope. But the unconverted, no matter who they are, do not have a relationship like we do. The One our hope is in is ever-living. And they can hope, but there is no God of integrity to follow through.

Now listen to this. Herbert Lockyer, in his book, "All The Promises In The Bible," quoted a man named Everet Storm, who was from Kitchener, Ontario, who said, "In a year and a half's time, in studying the Bible, he counted 8,487 promises by God in the Scriptures." Every one of them is good, because God made them, and God lives. If we would only meet the conditions, He will follow through without fail, because He never lies. He is absolutely trustworthy.

The Greeks and the Romans had nothing like this that they could draw upon, and that is why their thoughts about hope were so confused. They had the capacity to hope, but they had no one to fulfill the hopes, because God was not working with them. God was not using them. He was using the Israelitish people. By and large, they despised the Israelitish people and rejected them and could not get any help from the Israelites because of the way they felt toward the Israelites.

I want to finish this sermon off by reading something that apparently a man went through. He went through it in horrible, horrible circumstances. What I am going to read to you modern interpreters of the Bible feel that maybe this did not really happen to a man; maybe it *did* happen to a man. They are not really sure. Was it Jeremiah? They look upon him as being the author of the book of Lamentations. He probably was. Was it something Jeremiah went through, or is it really a personification of the city of Jerusalem, speaking as if it were one person? It is interesting to read this because of what it leads to. I am going to read 33 verses, because it takes this to get around to what he was leading to.

Lamentations 3:1-33 I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day. He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe. [Do you think you are going through something?] He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out [He has made a

prisoner of me]; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He has been to me a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush. He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate. He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow. He has caused the arrows of His quiver to pierce my loins. I have become the ridicule of all my people—their taunting song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood. He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes. You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity. And I said, "My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD ." Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers and sinks within me. [Things are beginning to turn here.] This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. [As bad as it was, hope is beginning to creep into his mind.] Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. [Positive thoughts are beginning to come in.] They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach. For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

There is an example of hope that every one of us can put before him and use as a guide. Hardly anybody was ever treated like Jeremiah was, and yet he did not give up. He endured it. He came out the other end, and he lived probably well into his 80s and 90s, and the last we hear of him he was in Ireland. But he made it.