

Conversation Starter

For the week of January 4 to 10, 2009

This week's theme: Know The Hope
Current sermon series: Mystery Revealed
Sunday's Readings: Ephesians 1:3-6 & 15-23 John 1:1-18

While you are waiting for Jesus to return, God doesn't want you to stay "stuck in a rut" or believe that life is meaningless, hopeless or without purpose. As spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, God proclaimed that He has plans for you – wonderful plans: *For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)* Notice that God's plans are designed to give you hope. His plans are meant for you to know the hope, the abundant hope, He has available for you. The apostle Paul understood this as shown to us through his prayers for Christians living in Ephesus: *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which God has called you – the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints and His incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:18-19)* The Christian life, then, is meant to be built on hope. OR to put it another way, for Christians, hope is foundational to living in Christ's victory. But remember this: hope as mentioned in the Bible isn't to be based on the accumulation of wealth or things nor in our skills, abilities, gifts and achievements. Biblical hope isn't to be based on our achievements or accomplishments nor is it to be based on any person except one – that is, Jesus. As the words to a long-time well-known hymn remind us:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Questions for discussion:

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt hopeless. Why did you feel this way? What were the circumstances that led up to you feeling this way?
2. In what ways has God helped you overcome feelings of hopelessness and/or helped you get out of hopeless situations?
3. How do you think the typical English dictionary defines hope?
4. In what ways is the biblical understanding of hope different than the dictionary definition?
5. Spend some time praying for those in your group (or someone else you know) who is struggling to find hope right now.

If time permits, continue past this point for further discussion:

READ Isaiah 40:31 in the New International Version.

6. What can "rob" us of hope?
7. What are some things we can do to know the hope of the Lord in even greater ways?
8. Based on the Isaiah 40:31 reading above, how does "hope" help us?
9. What are some scriptures that have provided you with hope?