

## Where Does True Hope Come From?

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*Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup> So they said to one another, "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt." <sup>5</sup> Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the Israelites. <sup>6</sup> And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes <sup>7</sup> and said to all the congregation of the Israelites, "The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. <sup>8</sup> If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. <sup>9</sup> Only, do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them." (Numbers 14:1-9)*

### 1. Four Trapped Crew Members

The Golden Ray, a ship carrying 4,000 vehicles, overturned early last Sunday morning after leaving the port of Brunswick. Last Monday, the US Coast Guard rescued twenty crew members. The rescue team found four crew members were still missing. On Monday, crews heard the trapped men tapping the hull. Rescue teams drilled a small hole into the hull of the ship to get food and water to those who were trapped. Three of the men were freed on Monday afternoon, before the last was safely extracted several hours later.

The four crew members were trapped inside the vessel for about 40 hours without water and food. As time went by, they became hopeless. But they did not give up on living because the rescue team assured them that help was on the way.

### 2. The Twelve Spies

Numbers chapter 13 tells us what happened when the Israelites arrived in the wilderness of Paran. The plan was to send a scouting party to search the land. The party was made up of one man from each tribe. When they came back after 40 days' search, representatives of the people gathered together to hear the report from the twelve spies. Every scouting member said that Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, but it was a land occupied by strong people in walled cities (verse 28). The ten spies report "**We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we**" (verse 31). "**We seemed like**

**grasshoppers in our own eyes”** (v. 33). However, Joshua and Caleb say **“Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it”** (13:30).

Numbers 14:1 and the following tell us of the response of the congregation. Many people were so discouraged by the pessimistic report. People wept aloud that night, complaining against Moses and Aaron. The people said to each other, **“Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt”** (14:4). The excitement about entering the promised land was gone. The people were in despair. Many became hopeless. They regretted leaving Egypt for the promised land and even complained against God, saying, **“Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to fall by the sword?”** (verse 3) What do you think was God’s reaction? I were God, I would have been upset and disappointed. The Israelites should have remembered all of what God had done for them. The people forgot how God led the Israelites out of slavery and through the desert with many miracles. The Lord had protected the people, fed them, and fulfilled his promise.

The goal of the journey from Egypt was to enter the promised land. Yet when the Israelites were about to enter the land, they were full of fear and did not try to occupy the promised land. They forgot about God’s promise and mighty power, and wished to return to Egypt because they were so afraid of the people living in the land of Canaan. Joshua and Caleb encouraged the congregation to look at the positive factors, declaring, **“The land that we went through as spies is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us”** (verses 7 & 8). They add, **“do not fear the people of the land, ... their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them”** (verse 8).

Joshua and Caleb encouraged the Israelites to trust in God and move ahead into the promised land. The Israelites rejected the advice and threatened to stone Joshua and Caleb to death. Why do the Israelites become hopeless? It is because the people focused on outward circumstances rather than God’s promises. When the people paid more attention to the circumstances than what God was going to do, they were filled with fear and lost hope.

### **3. The Walk to Emmaus**

Luke 24:13 is an episode about the two disciples of Jesus who are walking from Jerusalem towards the town of Emmaus. The two disciples are not the two of the twelve but two of Jesus’ wider circle of disciples. They might have been a husband and a wife. One is named Cleopas. Nothing beyond his name is known. Luke does not say anything about the other disciple.

The two disciples walk to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection of Jesus. Emmaus is located about 7 miles from Jerusalem. Although Luke does not tell us why they are walking towards Emmaus, the two disciples seem to be disappointed by the crucifixion of Jesus. While they walk, the disciples talk about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus during the week of Passover in Jerusalem.

Soon a stranger joins them and walks along with them. The two disciples do not know who the stranger is. Luke says that the stranger was the risen Jesus. Jesus asks them, “**What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?**” (Luke 24:17) They stand still, looking sad. Cleopas asks Jesus, “**Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?**” (verse 18) Jesus asks him, “**What things?**” They reply, “**The things about Jesus of Nazareth... and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him**” (verses 19-20).

The disciples said that they had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. They had expected Jesus to drive out the Romans and make Israel a great nation again. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, the two disciples lost all hope for Israel. This is likely why the disciples were returning to Emmaus.

Jesus says to them, “**how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?**” (verses 25 & 26) Jesus explains to them that his suffering and death was the fulfillment of the prophecy in the Old Testament.

As they approach Emmaus, Jesus acts as if he is going farther. But the two disciples urge Jesus to stay with them because it is late evening. Jesus goes with the disciples, takes bread, and gives thanks as part of the evening meal. When Jesus breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples, their eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus. Then Jesus disappears from their sight.

The two disciples ask each other, “**Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?**” (verse 32) We can imagine that their hearts are burning on the inside. The disciples’ hope had been revived. The disciples were full of excitement. Luke tells us that they go back to Jerusalem that night to share with other disciples the exciting news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

#### **4. Everyone Needs Hope**

Last week, I read an article about a miracle in China. A Chinese man, Li Zhihua from Xiangyang in Hubei Province, woke up from a 5-year coma. Li was knocked down by a motorbike in August 2013, while riding a scooter to work. When he was taken to the hospital, he was in a vegetative state. Li did not respond to anything. His wife, 57-year-old Zhang Guihuan stayed next to Li’s bed to chat with him and play his favorite songs, hoping his condition would improve. His wife slept only two to three hours a day and looked after her husband. Li miraculously regained his conscious last year. A wife’s hope became reality. Such a miracle does not happen every day.

Everyone needs hope in life. We hope in difficult situations, for physical healing and for different aspects in life. But hope in the Bible is different from

ordinary hope. When people hope something, they say their desire in the future, but no one knows whether their desire would be done or not. When people use the word hope, they express uncertainty rather than certainty. However, Christian hope is not just a desire for something good in the future, but rather, biblical hope is a confident expectation because our hope is based not on what we expect to happen but on God's promise and His faithfulness. If we wish our hope would happen, it requires faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, "**faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**" Biblical hope is confident that it will happen. There is a certainty that the good we expect will be done.

## 5. Conclusion

What word sticks to you most when you talk about Christianity with your non-believing friends? For me, one of the most important characteristics of Christian faith is "hope." Christians hope something good in the future no matter what. One of the important roles of Christians is to encourage the people to have hope by trusting in the Lord. When the Israelites heard the frightening reports from the ten spies, they became hopeless. But Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to trust in the Lord and helped the people to eventually have hope in God's promise. When Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, the two disciples left Jerusalem and walked to Emmaus with no hope. But on the way, Jesus walks with them and restores their hope in the Lord. If we are in despair, the Lord would send us someone to help us to have hope again in the Lord.

## 6. Application

After worship service today, our church trustees and elder team will share with you about the Activity Center. Let me share with you my story. When the former District Superintendent Dr. Hong sent me the profile of Swift Memorial Church before the bishop made an appointment, I felt that one of my missions at the church would be to revitalize the Activity Center. When the congregation decided to sell the facility last fall, I felt a bit like my mission ended. I was in many ways missing hope.

Recently a Korean lay person who went to Russia with me told me that he is interested in doing mission works at the Activity Center. I invited him to talk with the elder team. I am so thankful to him not because he is interested in doing mission works, but because he has no personal desire regarding the Activity Center. He just wishes that God's will would be done. Although the church has not made any decision yet, I believe that God may have sent him to fulfill God's dreams through using the facility. Paul says in Philippians 1:6, "**I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.**" Christian hope is based on God's promise and His plan. If God has a plan, God's will will be done.

Where does true hope come from? I believe that true hope comes from God because God is our creator, sustainer, and redeemer. God knows what the best for us is. As God's people, all we need to do is to wait on the Lord and see what God is doing. If God wants, God will accomplish His plans. Amen.