

PRISONERS OF HOPE

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INTRODUCTION

Last week I was in a pastor's meeting where George Snyman was speaking, and he said in passing, 'I am a prisoner of hope', with reference to his driving passion to be the instrument of change to the victims of the AIDS pandemic in the African continent. I'm sure many of you were stirred to action by his message last week. But the phrase 'prisoner of hope' sparked my heart and that is what I want to talk to you about this morning. Let's turn to Zechariah....

Zech.9:12 *Return to the stronghold, You prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.*

So firstly – what is a prisoner of hope – what is hope?

1. HOPE

What is it today? Common use today is: expectation, optimism, anticipation, a desire, dream or wish...'I hope it will happen'. This is not Biblical, Christian hope. Hope is not from my desires, not wishful thinking, it is something the unbeliever does not have.

Biblical hope is: Confident expectancy. God Himself IS my hope. Hope comes from God and is toward God, (eternal life, salvation, Jesus' return, resurrection of the redeemed, God's glory).

Hope goes from the seen into the unseen. Hope links the seen with the unseen.

1 Cor 15:19-20 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

Our hope is a solid, unshakeably sure thing in the unseen, eternal realm.

The hope is laid up for us in heaven –

Col 1:3-6 *We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 **because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven**, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel. Something 'laid up' is something solid waiting for us.*

The hope is after this life...resurrection –

1 Cor 15:19-21 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

The hope is eternal life –

Titus 1:2 *in **hope of eternal life** which God who cannot lie, promised before time began.*

The hope is our sure inheritance, in heaven....

1 Peter 1:3 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'

I sorrow with hope – my hope – I am really a child of eternity with Jesus – affects how I mourn; I sorrow with hope –

*1 Thess 4:13-18 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, **lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.** 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

So – our hope is laid up for us in heaven, eternity in Jesus' glory, it is totally sure.

2. PRISONERS OF HOPE

So **what is a prisoner of hope?** We know that we are described as prisoners in sin's dungeon, before we receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour. For some this is more a personal reality than others. But the shackles of sin have been around us all. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me!

Paul was a prisoner of hope. Speaking to the Jews he had called to see him in detention in Rome, he says –

***Acts 28:20** For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because **for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.**"*

For the hope of Israel he was in chains! The hope of Israel was the Messiah. He was a prisoner of hope. A prisoner of Jesus. But he calls himself always: a prisoner or *the* prisoner of Jesus Christ –

***Eph 3:1** For this reason I, Paul, **the prisoner of Christ Jesus** for you Gentiles;*

2 Tim 1:8** Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of **me His prisoner;

Philem 1** Paul, **a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

He was a prisoner of hope, a prisoner of Jesus. He did not see his physical chains as a binding thing, a restriction. Rather, he was a bond-servant, a prisoner of Jesus.

His physical chains were something that furthered the hope...the furtherance of the gospel...

Phil 1:12-14 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul saw himself as bound to Jesus, as a prisoner, a prisoner of hope.

We, like Paul, are prisoners of hope. Our sure hope is laid up, waiting for us in heaven...Jesus, eternal life, salvation. **Reaching into the unseen, this hope is an anchor of our soul...**holds us totally secure (can't fail – *sure*), and *steadfast* (stable, holds us from capsizing in storms). We are **safe and stable in this life** –

Heb 6:18-20 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus.

This is a picture of the hope set before us (in the unseen realm, the eternal) – firmly anchored in eternity, unshakeable, (where Jesus is, having made once for all atonement for our sin with His blood). In OT times, God's presence was covered, inaccessible, but at the death of Jesus, the veil was torn, and the way into the presence was made open to us who are covered by His blood. Our anchor goes all the way into the presence behind the veil...earth to heaven. We live now in time, with the hope anchor rope a part of the very substance of our new created spirit (in His likeness, God of Hope). The walk of faith follows hope's anchor rope, being kept sure and stable by the hope set before us...we are joined to the unseen, eternal realm by the hope that is set before us, the hope to come. We are prisoners of hope, prisoners of Jesus, anchored in eternity. Hallelujah.

3. RETURN TO THE STRONGHOLD...prisoners of hope

Let's look briefly at **the background** of this verse:

Zechariah was prophesying to Jews who had returned from captivity, but had failed to complete rebuilding of the temple. This was the first context of the book, but the second part of the book is looking forward to the coming of Messiah and the future glory. The Jews had returned from captivity, but had become distracted and had neglected the establishing of Zion, the temple, the place of God's presence. Similarly, we who are captives set free, can become busy and distracted and can forget what is central, pivotal, essential to who we are – God's presence, His 'presence within the veil'. The prisoners of hope needed to return to the fortress – to them this was talking of Zion, the place of the temple, the presence of God, the place of praise, the place where the King resided.

The stronghold, the fortress - refers to 'Zion' – David, when he became king, had understood that God had chosen Zion as the place to manifest His presence. (*Psalms 132:13,14*). It was a stronghold, and when David was established as King over Israel, he took the stronghold of Zion in Jerusalem which was occupied by 'enemy' and made it his place of residence. Then the tabernacle of David was erected in Zion, and later under Solomon the famed temple was built. God says in

this passage, which is looking forward prophetically to the coming of Jesus, the Saviour, that by the blood of the covenant (looking forward to Jesus' blood) He has set our prisoners free from the waterless pit (description of prisons in those days – mire, but no water supply). Yet His people, the prisoners of hope, are to return to the fortress – the place of His presence, the place of praise, the place of worship, as prisoners of hope. We need to **come back to the place of His presence, the place of praise, of worship, the place where the King resides.**

Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

We are anchored to the sure hope of eternal life ... **when the storms come, or when the water is calm**, we declare His greatness, we sing His praise, we sing our hope is in Him. We must live in the stronghold of Zion – the songs of Zion, the place of the presence of God, signal our return to the stronghold. Don't underestimate the importance of praise, coming into the presence of God – everything that is important centres around this, the fortress, the stronghold, the presence of God...

Heb 10:19-25 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Let's be people of the presence of God...prisoners of hope, returned to the stronghold, the place of His presence, of praise.

CONCLUSION

The prisoner of hope who lives in the stronghold of His presence, anchored by that eternal hope... receives the promise of God restoring double...

Phil 1:13-14 it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak...

If we have drifted, lost our central point of reference – a life lived in the Presence of God, a worshipper – let's heed the Word today... **Return to the stronghold, You prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.**