

PEOPLE OF HOPE – Part 1

Hope Assured

Preaching passage: **2 Peter 3:1-10**

Subject: What assurance we have in spite of scoffers

Complement: the day of the Lord will come.

Exegetical idea: We have the assurance, in spite of scoffers, that the day of the Lord will come.

Preaching idea: When you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.

Purpose: To encourage my hearers to hold fast to their assurance that Jesus is coming back a second time to this earth.

Summary paragraph: The people of hope have a problem. For generation after generation we have boldly declared that Jesus is coming again—soon! But Jesus has still not returned. How can we hold fast to our hope in the literal visible audible glorious return of Jesus in spite of the scoffers who mock such an idea as ridiculous? The answer is found in an inspired letter that the apostle Peter wrote to fellow Christians.

The people of hope have a problem. For generation after generation after generation we have boldly declared that Jesus is coming again—soon. And Jesus has still not returned in glory.

To make matters worse, people are starting to ridicule the idea of a literal return of Jesus. “Jesus is never coming back,” they say. “For almost 2000 years followers of Jesus have been boldly declaring that Jesus will return to this earth in glory. But he hasn’t shown up yet. Just forget about that ridiculous idea!”

The apostle Peter prophesied that such scoffers would come. We can read his inspired testimony in his second letter to followers of Jesus. 2 Peter 3:3-4

“Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”

The Greek noun translated “scoffers”, *empaiktes*, does not refer to an honest skeptic—someone who is wrestling with the big questions of life and admits to having more questions than answers. This Greek noun, used here in 2 Peter 3:4, has a different meaning than an honest skeptic. *Empaiktes* is only used twice in the entire NT—here in 2 Peter 3:4 and again in Jude 18 where Jude is quoting Peter’s words. But the verb form, *empaizo*, is used more frequently in the NT and helps us to get a better idea of the meaning of this Greek noun translated “scoffers”. Open your Bibles with me to Matthew 27:27-31: “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews.’” There’s the verb *empaizo*, they mocked Him, they scoffed at Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews.”

“Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.” This is not the behavior of an honest skeptic who is wrestling with the big questions of life and sometimes finds herself with more questions than answers. No, this is the behavior of a scoffer, one who ridicules and belittles. “They spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head”—driving the crown of thorns deep into His

brow. “And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.

The verbal abuse continues in Matthew 27:41-43. “Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, “I am the Son of God.”’” These scoffers are ridiculing Jesus, mocking Him.

Jesus had foretold that it would be so. Mark records the testimony of Jesus in Mark 10:33-34. “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him.” Don’t miss the next sentence: “And the third day He will rise again.” Someone ought to say Amen out there. And the third day He will rise again. That’s the rest of the story, but that’s a topic for another sermon.

Many of those who ridiculed Jesus were convicted that He was no ordinary teacher. They had seen Him heal the sick, and cast out demons. They had heard reliable reports that Jesus had even raised people from the dead. But they willfully, deliberately, set that evidence aside and instead of responding with a spirit of humility and faith, they mocked Jesus and ridiculed Him.

The apostle Peter prophesied that scoffers in the last days would act in a similar way. Look again with me at the inspired testimony of Peter in 2 Peter 3:3-7. “Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying,

‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

We have heard such mocking with our own ears. Such mocking has caused some to lose their assurance that Jesus will indeed return again in power and great glory. How should we respond to these mockers, these scoffers? Perhaps we should respond with the words of the apostle Peter, recorded in 2 Peter 3:8. “.....” Perhaps we should tell people that the Lord is not limited by time, the Lord is not time-bound. But still we have the problem that we have been proclaiming the imminent return of Jesus for generation after generation after generation and Jesus is still not here.

Perhaps we should respond with the words of the apostle Peter, recorded in 2 Peter 3:9. “.....” We could tell these scoffers that the Lord is merciful and patient, not willing that any should perish. But even we ask the question, “How long, O Lord?”

Is our hope assured? Can we still have confidence that Jesus will indeed return again in glory? Can we still boldly declare with the apostle Peter, “The day of the Lord will come!”?

My answer to those vital questions is “Yes! Yes! Yes!” Our hope is assured. We can still have confidence that Jesus will return again in glory. We can still boldly declare with the apostle Peter, “The day of the Lord WILL COME.”

The key to Peter’s confidence, the key to Peter’s assurance, is found at the beginning of Peter’s inspired testimony, 2 Peter 1:1. Peter addressed his second epistle “to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Our hope is assured because, like Peter, we have a precious faith. We believe the promise of Jesus that He will return again in glory because we trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

Peter had seen Jesus stand up in a small fishing boat in the midst of a storm on the lake and command the wind and the waves, “Peace be still!” Peter had heard Jesus boldly proclaim “I am the bread of life,” after having witnessed Jesus feed 5,000 men plus women and children with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Peter was present when Jesus boldly declared, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Then Peter followed Jesus to the tomb of Lazarus where Peter saw with his own eyes the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, by the power of Jesus. Peter heard Jesus say, “Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in Me. In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN and receive you to Myself that where I am there you may be also.”

Peter saw Jesus ascend into heaven. He heard with his own ears the words of the angels: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

And Peter had experienced in His own life and ministry the power of the Risen Christ. Once intimidated by external pressures and inward anxieties, Peter had denied that he even knew Jesus. But on the day of Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter boldly declared, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
Acts 2:36

Several days later, when Peter and John were on their way to the Temple to pray, they met a lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful. You know the story. The man was begging for alms. And Peter responded with these words, recorded in Acts 3:6-8. “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” The Scripture records that “he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.”

When asked to give account before the Sanhedrin, Peter boldly testified, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, ‘If we this day are judged for a good need done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here

before you whole. This is the stone, which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:8-12

Peter had a precious faith in Jesus as His Savior and Lord. And because Peter trusted Jesus, he believed His promise. He could say with the apostle Paul, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). What had Peter committed to Jesus until that day? Everything. Peter had a precious faith.

Peter could declare with the apostle Paul, “I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Peter’s hope in the glorious return of Jesus was assured because of His precious faith in Jesus as His Savior and Lord. Because Peter trusted Jesus, he believed His promise. That is why his hope was assured—in spite of the apparent delay, in spite of the scoffers who ridiculed and mocked. Peter could boldly declare, “The day of the Lord will come.” **When you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.**

I was reminded of the importance of trusting someone and believing his promise during my recent trip to Southeast Asia. David Tan and I had just visited the city of Iloilo in the Philippines. I was excited because ASI members there are launching a satellite TV network called HCBN, He’s Coming Broadcasting Network. I

like that name, don't you? Anyway, I was excited, and apparently a little distracted because when we got to the Iloilo airport to catch our flight on to Manila I discovered that I had left my waist pouch at the house, 45 minutes away and the person who drove us to the airport had already left to go home. Now my waist pouch isn't that valuable, but it contained my passport, my money, and my airline itinerary. I was in serious trouble! I couldn't even get inside the airport terminal. Without a moment's hesitation, David looked at me and said, "Stay here. I'll be back!" He took my checked bag and disappeared into the crowd. After a few minutes it dawned on me that I was standing all alone on the sidewalk in a strange land with no ID, no money, no itinerary, no cell phone, no address for the people in town. All I had was a promise, "I'll be back!"

But I didn't panic. Why? Because I had come to trust David Tan during our travels together. I knew that he loved God with all of his heart and he cared about me. He was a man of integrity. I knew that I could trust him, and so I could hold on to his promise with assurance: "I'll be back!" I'm not sure how long I waited on the sidewalk. It seemed like forever, and the time for our flight to leave was drawing perilously near. Finally, David re-emerged from the airport terminal with my boarding pass in hand. He had checked my bag and got a boarding pass for me without me even being in the terminal. Don't ask me how he did that. I didn't even want to ask! David had also called our hosts in town and a personal courier was on her way to hand deliver my waist pouch. Before long, I had my passport in hand, we flew through security, took a deep breath, and boarded our plane for Manila. I learned a valuable lesson that day: When you trust the person, you believe the

promise. All I had was David's promise: "I'll be back!" But when you trust the person, you believe the promise. It's the same way Jesus and His promise that He'll be back. **When you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.**

Almost a half-century has passed since Wayne Hooper penned the words to a hymn that Seventh-day Adventists have come to love all around the world. You've sung it many times, perhaps, but I want you to listen again to the words.

We have this hope that burns within our hearts
Hope in the coming of the Lord.
We have this faith which Christ alone imparts,
Faith in the promise of His Word.

Our hope in the return of Jesus in glory is not based upon our feelings. Our hope in the return of Jesus in glory is not based on the tide of popular opinion. Our hope in the return of Jesus in glory is not based on our calendrical calculations. Our hope is based on Jesus and the promise of His Word. We believe by faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world and so we believe His promise that He will come again and receive us to Himself that where He is there we may be also. **When you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.** Am I telling you the truth today? **When you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.**

Brothers and sisters, the Day of the Lord will come. Lift up the trumpet and loud let it ring. Jesus is coming again. Cheer up, you pilgrims, be joyful and sing. Jesus is coming again. Our hope is assured. Hallelujah!

Children's story

Pastor Patty Hofer told me something really amazing earlier this week. She told me that a SMART CAR was going to be delivered to the church on Friday. Wasn't that an amazing thing to say? Do you think I believed her? Yes, I did. Because I know Pastor Hofer. I trust her. So I believed her promise. And did someone actually deliver a SMART CAR to the church yesterday? Yes, they did. Did you see the SMART CAR out in the lobby? It's there, just as Pastor Hofer promised it would be.

I would like to make a promise to you today. I'm going to promise you that at the end of this children's lesson, I'm going to give you a bright, shiny 50-cent coin. How many of you believe me that I'm going to give you a bright, shiny 50-cent coin? Why do you believe my promise? You believe my promise because you know me and trust me. Right? You know that I wouldn't lie to you. You know that I'll keep my promise. So, what are you going to do with your bright, shiny 50-cent coin. Well, you could save it. You could give it as an offering in church or in Sabbath school. You could give it as a present to someone who needs it. That's up to you. You can do whatever you want with your bright, shiny 50-cent coin.

Thank you for coming up for the children's story today. If you believe my promise to give you a bright, shiny 50-cent coin, you can meet me over by the organ when the organ starts playing. OK? You can go back to your seats now!

PEOPLE OF HOPE – Part 2

Hope Embraced

Preaching passage: **2 Peter 3:10-11, 14, 17-18**

Subject: Since the Day of the Lord will come, how should we live

Complement: in holy conduct and godliness, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Exegetical idea: Since the day of the Lord will come, we should live holy and godly lives, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Preaching idea: **When you embrace Jesus and rest in His loving embrace, it changes everything.**

Purpose: To encourage my hearers to seek a personal life-changing relationship with Jesus that will lead to a life of holiness and godliness.

Summary paragraph: If you long to experience a holy way of life, in speech and actions, and manifest a reverent attitude of heart and mind as you wait for the glorious return of Jesus, draw ever closer to Jesus, experiencing a personal, life-changing relationship with Him.

Introductory comments before prayer:

This is part 2 of our series on People of Hope. We're studying Peter's second letter to followers of Jesus. We began this series by affirming that our hope in the coming of Jesus in glory is assured. That hope is not based upon our feelings, or upon the tide of popular opinion, or our mathematical calculations. That is in the coming of Jesus is based upon Jesus Himself. We trust Jesus. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world, and when you trust Jesus you believe His promise—Hope Assured.

Now Peter will speak to us about Hope Embraced. He will challenge us to live holy and godly lives as we wait for the glorious return of Jesus.

Before we begin our study today, let's pray together.

(Young person comes onto the platform, kneels in prayer, and sings)

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart, in my heart,

Lord I want to be more holy in my heart.

In my heart, in my heart,

Lord I want to be more holy in my heart.

Have you ever prayed that prayer? "Lord, I want to be more holy." Maybe you just stumbled and fell—again. I remember a time when I was sitting at the meal table with our two young sons. Christopher knocked over a glass of drink, and with some covert irritation in my voice I said, "Why did you do that?" As soon as the words left my mouth, I knew that I had said something foolish. "Why did you do that?" It was an accident. Now I had a choice to make. Would I try to cover up my inappropriate comment or apologize? I opted for the latter. "I'm sorry, Christopher. That was a foolish thing to say." "I forgive you, Daddy," he replied, "but you need to use it as a sermon illustration!" Well, it would certainly illustrate the text, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children" but it would also illustrate the need to be more holy in my heart. We've all had times like that, haven't we? Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

Or maybe you were inspired by the life of a godly mentor, or you read or watched a biography of a great woman or man of God and you cried out, “Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart!”

I’m certain that the apostle Peter cried out, “Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.” He had times when he fell flat on his face, and he also had times when he witnessed the remarkable demonstration of a holy life. I’m sure that Peter prayed, “Lord I want to be more holy in my heart.”

In his second epistle to those of like precious faith, the apostle Peter also encouraged other followers of Jesus to live holy lives as they waited for the glorious return of Jesus. We can read Peter’s challenge in 2 Peter 3:11. The NKJV reads, “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.” The KJV says “in holy conversation and godliness.” The NIV puts it this way: “You ought to live holy and godly lives.”

I was interested in those two concepts: “holy conduct and godliness” in the NKJV, “holy conversation and godliness” in the KJV, “holy and godly lives” in the NIV. The word *αναστοφη* translated conduct (NKJV) or conversation (KJV) or lives (NIV) is used 13 times in the NT, 8 times in Peter’s epistles. This is an important concept for Peter. Here in 2 Peter 3:11 the noun *αναστοφη* is modified by the adjective “holy”—and translated as holy conduct, holy conversation, holy lives.

In 2 Peter 2, Peter speaks about the opposite of holy conduct, holy conversation. Referring to the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, Peter makes

this observation in 2 Peter 2:7: “and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct, filthy conversation, of the wicked.”

Is Peter just referring to speech here, to conversation, or to actions, conduct, or both? Peter uses this same Greek noun *ἀναστοφή* six times in his first epistle. We won't look at every reference. Let's just look at 1 Peter 1:15. “as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” NKJV (“in all manner of conversation” KJV) Conduct? Conversation? Both? What do you think?

I agree. Both. Conduct that includes conversation.

Speech and actions. My lexicon (Arndt, Bauer, and Gingrich) defines *ἀναστοφή* as “way of life” and cites Galatians 1:13 as an example, where Paul speaks about his former “way of life” in Judaism.

Since the day of the Lord will come, how then should we live? Peter's answer is simple: a holy way of life, both in speech and in actions. Let's look again at our verse in 2 Peter 3:11, because Peter adds another word: “.....and godliness.”

At first reading, “holy conduct and godliness” (holy conversation and godliness KJV; holy and godly lives NIV) sounded the same to me. What do you think?

The Greek noun here translated godliness is *εὐσεβεία*. It's the same word used by Paul in that much quoted warning to young Timothy about those in the last days who have “ a form of *εὐσεβεία*”, a form of godliness (2 Timothy 3:5). My Young's concordance translates *εὐσεβεία* as piety or reverence.

I suggest that Peter is speaking here about the attitude of the heart and mind. We are called not only to a holy way of life, both in speech and actions, but we are also called to have a reverent attitude of heart and mind toward God. Some people may have a “form of godliness” but God sees the heart. God can clearly perceive whether or not that reverent attitude is genuine or not.

Since the day of the Lord will come, how should we live? The apostle Peter answers “a holy way of life, both in speech and actions, and a reverent attitude of heart and mind.” That makes sense to us, doesn’t it? God is holy. He wants us to be holy in all speech and actions, and to manifest a reverent attitude of heart and mind. But here is the big question. How? How can we experience that holy way of life and reverent attitude of heart and mind?

There is no doubt that it will involve intentionality on our part. It won’t happen by accident. But again I ask the question, “How? How can we experience that holy way of life in speech and actions and reverent attitude of heart and mind?” We’ve all met people who just try harder and harder to be holy and seem to fail time after time after time. We’ve also met people who focus so much on “holiness” and “right living” that they are harsh, demanding, and critical.

I received an e-mail recently from a Hope Sabbath School participant. This is what she told me:

“I need prayer-help! I had a heavy discussion half an hour ago with a church member who sees only the bad things in the church

and thinks that we all have to be sinless and perfect before Jesus comes! She thinks her duty is to tell people their sins and to teach them how to live the right way!”

We’ve all met people like that. I’m sure that many of them are sincere. But is that the way to experience a holy way of life? Unfortunately, it may have the exact opposite effect, driving people away in despair.

How can we experience that holy way of life in speech and actions and that reverent attitude of heart and mind that the Lord intends for us as we wait for His glorious return? I want to suggest to you that the answer is found in the last verse of Peter’s second epistle. 2 Peter 3:18 “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

In Hebrew thinking, knowledge is much more than information. Knowledge is relationship. Grow in your relationship with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A holy way of life and a reverent attitude of heart and mind are not found by embracing a set of ethical behaviors. A holy way of life and a reverent attitude of heart and mind are not found by embracing a list of rules and regulations. A holy way of life and a reverent attitude of heart and mind are found when we embrace Jesus. He is our Hope. He is our Savior. He is our Lord. So focus on Jesus. Draw close to Jesus. Nurture your relationship with Jesus.

Some months ago, a young mother visited our church website. She had watched Hope Sabbath School on the Hope Channel and discovered that she could

watch Hope Sabbath School on our website, www.forestlakechurch.org. She was just recovering from a battle with cancer, she was parent to two little children, and she felt spiritually disconnected. She had all of the Sabbath School study guides from the past two years, but they had never been opened. When she visited our website, she was delighted to discover that all of the programs from past lessons were also available. She watched one program each evening, covering a quarter's worth of lessons every two weeks: studies on Jesus, the atonement, discipleship, mission. She sent us this testimony: "My love for Jesus has been renewed!"
Hallelujah!

A renewed love relationship with Jesus changes everything. As you experience a personal life-changing relationship with Jesus, your life will be transformed. A holy way of life, and a reverent attitude of heart and mind will be manifested in your life that would be impossible apart from a personal life-changing relationship with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior is a process—it's a journey. It doesn't happen overnight. But by the grace of God, it does happen. It must happen. Not to earn our salvation, but as an irrefutable witness to the fact that we have a personal, life-changing relationship with Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

How many of you are married? Do you remember back when you were just getting to know your spouse? It was almost 35 years ago for me and Bodil. I know, that's a long time ago, though in some ways it seems like yesterday. I was a 3rd year theology student at Newbold College in England. (Note for GC devotional: My major

theology professor was a very tall Norwegian named Dr. Jan Paulsen. I've always looked up to him, in more ways than one. He has often reminded me that he sounded defeated me in a college tennis tournament. He had a slight height advantage.) At the beginning of my 3rd year at Newbold College a daring young American college freshman arrived name Bodil. We first connected as part of a singing group. Then I asked her to sing with me at a youth rally in London, which required some regular and diligent practice in one of the music rooms in Salisbury Hall. I had no secret agenda, I promise. Then there was a week of prayer. We started staying behind after the meetings, talking together and praying. Before long, I was composing poems and buying flowers. I always checked my mailbox in Salisbury Hall to see if Bodil had written me a note. This was before e-mail and facebook and twitter. Back then, the web was something that a spider made. These were actual hand-written notes, complete with doodles and smiley faces! Even though I was busy with my studies, I made time to spend with her. I saved her a place in the dining room in Moor Close. We talked together and learned more about each other every day. I loved to listen to her stories, to share her hopes and dreams. As the months passed, I realized that everything was changing. Even my friends noticed the transformation. My behavior was changing. My speech was changing. Even the way that I thought was changing. That happens, you know, when you are involved in a life-changing love relationship with someone. Everything changes. That personal transformation doesn't happen overnight. It's a process. It's a journey. But the change does happen, and it's not a burden. It's a joy.

It's the same in our relationship with Jesus. When we experience an intimate relationship with Jesus, we experience personal transformation. Everything changes: our behavior, our speech, even the way that we think.

When we embrace Jesus and notice personal transformation occurring in the context of our relationship with Him, we won't walk around with a prideful, "holier than thou" attitude. God forbid. Peter closes his second epistle with these words: "To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."

We will never cease to confess with the apostle Peter, "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." We are a people of hope. Our hope is assured. And in the context of a personal life-changing relationship with Jesus, our hope is embraced.

And so I appeal to you, my brothers and sisters, if you want to be more holy in your heart, if you want a holy way of life in speech and actions, and a reverent attitude of heart and mind, **embrace Jesus today and rest in His loving embrace.** Spend time with Jesus today. Commune with Jesus today. Fall in love with Jesus again today. He is longing for you to live in His loving embrace today. So **embrace Jesus today and rest in His loving embrace.** That is the way to experience a holy way of life in speech and conduct, and a reverent attitude of heart and mind.

Then when you sing, "Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart" you don't need to be anxious or afraid. You can rejoice that the One who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

Who'll join me in singing that song as the prayer of your heart today? Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart. It will happen as we embrace Jesus and draw ever closer to Him. Why don't we slip to our knees and sing that song together right now. And then we can sing "In my heart Lord, and in my life Lord, be glorified today." And as we sing, **embrace Jesus today and rest in His loving embrace.**

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart, in my heart

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

In my heart, in my heart,

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

In my heart, Lord, be glorified, be glorified,

In my heart, Lord, be glorified today.

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified,

In my life, Lord, be glorified today.

PEOPLE OF HOPE – Part 3

Hope Shared

Preaching passage: **2 Peter 3:12a**

Subject: What those of like precious faith who are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ should do since the day of the Lord will come

Complement: look expectantly for and hasten the coming of the day of God.

Exegetical idea: Since the day of God will come, those of like precious faith who are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ should look expectantly for and hasten the coming of the day of God.

Preaching idea: **God does not want you to keep this hope to yourself. It must be shared.**

Purpose: To encourage my hearers to join the Lord of the harvest in His work while they wait with expectation for His return in glory

Summary paragraph: Since the day of God will come, we should join the Lord of the harvest in His work while we wait with expectation for the return of Jesus in glory.

I'd like to begin our study today with a trivia question. Which fictional detective is famous for saying these words: "Elementary, my dear Watson"? Does anyone know the answer to that question? Sherlock Holmes. When I was a young lad growing up in England, I was always fascinated by the stories about Sherlock Holmes and his lifelong friend, Dr. John Watson. There were 56 stories in the series by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock Holmes noticed things that other people missed. I learned an important lesson from that fictional detective. We need to pay

attention to the details. That lesson applies not only in detective work, but also to a study of the Word of God.

But did you know that Sherlock Holmes never actually said “Elementary, my dear Watson” in any of the 56 short stories. That’s a myth that developed. In one short story, the Crooked Man, Holmes refers to his lifelong friend as “my dear Watson.” Later in the story, when Watson affirms Holmes for his brilliant powers of deduction, Holmes replies “Elementary!” And somehow, over time, someone put those two comments together and created a comment that is now legendary—Elementary, my dear Watson.

People do the same thing with the Word of God. They cut and paste the Word of God and make the Bible say things that aren’t in the book. That’s why we need to study the Bible for ourselves—not a careless reading, but a careful investigation. We need to pay attention to the details.

In this series on People of Hope, we have been carefully studying the details of the inspired testimony of the apostle Peter in chapter 3 of his second letter to those of like precious faith. We have discovered that our hope concerning the return of Jesus in glory is assured. That hope is not based on our feelings, or the tide of popular opinion, or our mathematical calculations. That hope is based upon Jesus. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and when you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.

We have also discovered that since all these things will be dissolved, we ought to live a holy way of life in speech and actions, and have a reverent attitude of

heart and mind. And that holy life and reverent attitude is not found by trying harder or by trying to enforce a list of rules and regulations on those around us. That holy way of life and reverent attitude is found in the context of a personal transforming love relationship with Jesus. He is our hope embraced. When we embrace Jesus and rest in His loving embrace it changes everything.

Now the apostle Peter speaks about Hope Shared. Let's continue our careful investigation of this inspired testimony in 2 Peter 3:12. I'll begin reading with verse 11 to give us a little context. "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God."

Did you notice those two present participles?—looking for and hastening. Both involve continuing, ongoing action as we wait for the coming of the day of God. "Looking for" could be interpreted in a variety of ways. If I was driving through a town looking for a place to live because I'm thinking about possibly relocating to that town in the next year, that would be one kind of looking for. But if I'm a devoted spouse or dedicated parent looking in the airport terminal for a loved one who is returning from a long journey, that would be another kind of looking for. Wouldn't you agree? So what type of "looking for" is implied in 2 Peter 3:12.

Does the verb that Peter uses, translated "looking for," give us any clues? It's the verb προσδοκᾶω. It literally means to look toward, to look with anticipation, to eagerly expect. Let's look at a few Bible passages where the verb προσδοκᾶω is used. Luke 3:15—"Now as the people were in expectation—there is our verb

προσδοκᾶω. That sounds more intense than just a casual looking for, doesn't it?

"Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not..." There was a sense of anticipation, eager expectation. People were looking for the Messiah to come, and some wondered whether John the Baptist might be the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams.

When Herod Antipas imprisoned John the Baptist, John sent a message to Jesus. The story is recorded in Matthew 11:2-3. "..... Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" There's the same verb--προσδοκᾶω. Do we look for another?—not casually, not carelessly, but with anticipation, with expectation. That's the verb found in 2 Peter 3:12—looking for the coming of the day of God, not casually, not carelessly, but with anticipation, with expectation.

Why is it so important to look with anticipation, with expectation for the return of Jesus in glory? Perhaps the answer is found in a parable that Jesus told, recorded in Matthew 24, beginning with verse 45. "....." (45-51)

When you don't look with expectation, when you don't live with anticipation, it's easy to become careless, to live as if Jesus is never coming back. That's why Peter encourages us to be looking for, with anticipation and eager expectation. And the verb is a present active participle, which implies continued, ongoing action.

So how do you maintain that state of expectation, that state of anticipation? The answer is found in our text in 2 Peter 3:12—"looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God." When we join the Lord of the harvest in His work, we remain focused in anticipation and eager expectation.

There have been many heated discussions about whether or not we can hasten the day of God. After all, God's purposes know no haste and no delay (The Desire of Ages, p. 32) God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world. But since God knows what is and what will be, He also knows how our involvement in His harvest work now will affect the final outcome of this great controversy.

We are called to hasten the coming of the day of God. "Hastening" is also a present active participle, implying continuing, ongoing action. There is a work to be done, and that work will not cease until our Lord Jesus returns in glory.

The verb translated "hastening" is σπευδω. It is found in Luke 2. We'll start reading with verse 8. "....." (Luke 2:8-16) Do you sense the earnest desire to meet the Messiah that motivates the shepherds to "make haste"?

The same verb σπευδω is used twice in the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:5-6. "....." Do you notice how earnest desire motivates Zacchaeus to act?

Look with eager expectation and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God. I like that translation, because earnest desire always translates into action. When we are looking with eager expectation and earnest desire for the return of our Lord, we will join the Lord of the harvest in His work.

In a sermon preached on October 11, 1885, Ellen White gave this counsel: "Our work is to seek the closest union with the Son of God, (that's what we were talking about in part 2 of this series), to learn in His school, to become meek and

lowly of heart, to work the works of Christ, advancing His kingdom and hastening His coming” (RH Feb 28, 1888).

That’s what Jesus is talking about in Luke 10, especially verse 2. Jesus says, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” I would love to spend a week with you unpacking the powerful message of Jesus contained in Luke 10. Through that passage God has caught my attention and shown me that He wants me to eagerly expect and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God.

After about 8 years of study, and covert resistance, the Spirit of God convicted me that it was time to write down what I had learned. This little book was finally published in May of last year, and tens of thousands of copies are already in print. The book has been translated into several languages, including Korean, Spanish and Portuguese, and it is currently being translated into Malay, Indonesian, Tagalog, Mandarin, Thai, Norwegian, Italian, to name just a few.

But more exciting than the number of translations are the stories of what God is doing as people are sharing the hope that is ours in Jesus. Since January, thousands of study groups have formed around the world—at last count more than 5,000 study groups. Here’s a testimony that I received this past week from a young family in Wisconsin.

Arnold is a disabled auto mechanic living in Wisconsin. It would be easy for him to sit on the sidelines and let others join the Lord of the harvest in His work. But Peter urges every follower of Jesus to look with expectation and hasten the

coming of the day of God. So Arnold requested a DVD series on The Radical Prayer so that he could lead a study group in his church in central Wisconsin. At first, he was a bit discouraged when only 5 people showed up. But then Arnold remembered the words of Jesus: "The harvest truly is great." Jesus wants us to see the world for His radical perspective. So Arnold didn't give up. He led this small group of 5 through the six-part series on The Radical Prayer.

Do you want to know the rest of the story? One of those attending his study group was an 82 year old who is almost blind. After attending that Radical Prayer study group, Clem started a study group in his independent living facility and he has 6 of the residents attending. Clem has also started a ministry to prison inmates. Clem might now be able to see well, but the Lord has given him spiritual sight! Jesus was right. The harvest truly is great.

Another couple attending Arnold's Radical Prayer study group, Dean and Pam, were also impacted by the teaching of Jesus. Dean is starting a men's study group in their local church. His wife Pam was quite shy and reserved, but in response to the Radical Prayer study group Pam has started a women's study group in their church. She is also in charge of women's ministries. And Arnold, the disabled mechanic, who hadn't preached for years, has preached three times since he led that Radical Prayer study group. He has given the Lord of the harvest permission to throw him out into His harvest and he is looking forward with expectation and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God.

Debbie took a copy of The Radical Prayer DVDs back to her church in Michigan. She started three study groups at different times during the week. Debbie was so impacted by the teaching of Jesus in Luke 10 that she asked the Michigan conference if she could teach a seminar about The Radical Prayer at camp meeting! More than 20 people attended the seminar. You say, That's not very many people. But look what God did through the small group at Arnold's church in Wisconsin.

Their stories have been repeated over and over again in different places around the world. But I also have my own story to share. As I began to pray the radical prayer, giving the Lord of the harvest permission to throw me out into His harvest, I am looking forward with greater expectation and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God. Almost two years ago, almost exactly at the time that I submitted the manuscript for The Radical Prayer, I got a phone call from Mark Finley. Mark asked me if we would like to have a satellite meeting at Forest Lake Church. That's like asking me if I like to take a walk out in the country with my one true love—the answer is YES. Little did I realize it, but God was preparing me for something more. After almost two months of personal mentoring with Mark, God threw me out to Vancouver, WA, to hold a citywide series of meetings. We saw many miracles during those meetings earlier this year, but most of the miracles are yet to come. A leader's kit with all of the sermon manuscripts and PowerPoint slides will be available in a few weeks. A book and audio book will be available by the end of the year. We are praying for 10,000 evangelistic study groups to form.

I recently returned from a missionary tour in southeast Asia. Shortly before I left Orlando, I was impressed to load the entire evangelistic series from Vancouver, WA, onto a brand new 8 GB thumb drive. I had no plans to preach any evangelistic sermons on my trip—only inspirational messages to Christian business leaders and a 3-day preaching workshop for pastors in South Korea. Three days into my trip, two businessmen from Jakarta approached me at an ASI convention in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. They asked me if I would begin an evangelistic series the following Sunday in Jakarta, in preparation for Mark Finley’s citywide meetings the following week. My first reaction was “You’re talking to the wrong person! You need to talk to a seasoned evangelist like Mark Finley or Ron Halvorsen.” But then I remembered my brand new 8 GB thumb drive, and I realized that the Lord of the harvest had planned everything perfectly. I was blessed to start an evangelistic series in Jakarta two days later! The little church was packed, and I am certain that I was blessed as much or more than any of those who attended the meetings!

As I join the Lord of the harvest in His work, I find myself eagerly expecting and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God. Perhaps that’s why the Lord of the harvest invites us to join Him in His work. He could use angels. He could write His messages in the sky. But our great and awesome God knows that when we join Him in His harvest work, our own hearts are blessed. When we join Him in His work, we look with more eager expectation and earnest desire for the coming of the day of God.

(For GC devotional: I brought a gift for you today. It's an audio book of The Radical Prayer. I listen to that book on my iPod. I want to remember why I'm here. I want you to remember why you are here. We are called to look forward with anticipation and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God. I want to invite you to listen to this message on your iPod or on your CD player as you commute to work. Perhaps you'll decide to hold a Radical Prayer study group in your home, in your local church.

The hope that is ours is not a hope to keep to ourselves. It is a hope to be shared. When we share the hope that we have found in Jesus, we will eagerly expect and earnestly desire in glorious return.

PEOPLE OF HOPE – Part 4

Hope Realized

Preaching passage: **2 Peter 3:13**

Subject: What followers of Jesus look for in keeping with God's promise

Complement: a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells

Exegetical idea: Believing God's promise, followers of Jesus for a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

Preaching idea: **Be glad and rejoice forever because God wants to spend eternity with you.**

Purpose: To encourage my hearers to believe the promise of God that He will make all things new.

Summary paragraph: God has promised that He will create a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. He wants you to be a part of that new creation where all things will be made new. In that new heavens and new earth we will be glad and rejoice forever.

I am so thankful today for the promises of God's Word. Aren't you? The apostle Peter was right when he said that we have been given "exceedingly great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4). My wife Bodil and I hide those exceedingly great and precious promises of God's Word in our hearts by singing Scripture songs. We sing the promises of God during family worship, while we are taking our morning walks, while we are driving in the car. We'll never become famous roving minstrels but we do want our hearts to be filled with the exceedingly great and precious promises of God's Word.

One of my mentors who filled his heart with the exceedingly great and precious promises of God's Word was Elder N. R. "Reggie" Dower. Some of you may

remember him. He served as a local pastor, president of the Texico conference, the Texas conference, and the Washington conference, before becoming ministerial director of the General Conference. About 10 years ago, shortly before his death, I was visiting him in his home in Ooltewah, Tennessee, near the campus of Southern Adventist University. He had survived a brain aneurism but now his health was failing. As I sat by his bedside, I read to him some of the exceedingly great and precious promises of God's Word. It was obvious that Elder Dower had hidden many of those promises in His heart. I could see his lips moving while I was reading! Have you ever met anyone like that? Filled up with the promises of God's Word. I will never forget the comment that Elder Dower made that day as we were sharing the promises of God together. "They're all true," he said. "They're all true!"

Today, in part 4 of our series on People of Hope, we are going to consider one of those exceedingly great and precious promises from the Word of God. We have been studying Peter's inspired testimony to those of like precious faith, recorded for us in 2 Peter 3. We have discovered that our hope in the glorious return of Jesus is assured. That hope is not based on our feelings, or the tide of popular opinion, or our mathematical calculations. Our hope is based upon Jesus. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And when you trust Jesus, you believe His promise.

We have also learned from our study of 2 Peter 3 that while we wait for the glorious return of Jesus, we are called to live holy lives, in speech and action, and to have a reverent attitude of heart and mind. Just trying harder, or attempting to enforce a list of rules and regulations does not accomplish that holy way of life. It is

only possible through a personal life-changing relationship with Jesus. He is our Hope embraced. When you embrace Jesus and rest in His loving embrace, it changes everything.

In part 3 of this series, we were reminded that God does not want us to keep this hope to ourselves. It must be shared. The people of hope will look forward to and hasten the coming of the day of God. As we join the Lord of the harvest in His work, blessings will not only come to those around us—our own lives will also be blessed. As our earnest desire for the coming of the day of God moves us to action, we will remain focused with anticipation and eager expectation as we wait for the return of Jesus.

Now, Peter reminds us of another precious promise from the Word of God. I have entitled this message Hope Realized. We can read Peter’s inspired testimony in 2 Peter 3:13. “Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

The apostle Peter has told us on several occasions in this chapter that this world as we know it will come to an abrupt end. Look at 2 Peter 3:10. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” And again in 2 Peter 3:12 we read, “looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.”

That sounds like really bad news. “Nevertheless,” Peter says. You see, when God shows up, it doesn’t matter how bad things are, it doesn’t matter how hopeless things might appear, when God shows up there is always a “nevertheless.” Almost all strength is gone...nevertheless. Almost all hope is gone...nevertheless. When God is by our side, there is always a nevertheless. The apostle Paul declares, “He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him give us all things!” (Romans 8:32) It’s true that the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless, Peter says, “we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

The most common word in Greek translated promise is *επαγγελια*. In 2 Peter 3:13, Peter uses another word, *επαγγελμα*, which is only used twice in the entire New Testament. The other place is at the beginning of Peter’s second letter where he speaks about “exceedingly great and precious promises.” Which promise is Peter referring to in 2 Peter 3:13 when he says, “Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells? Can someone quote for me a specific promise that Jesus gave to His disciples regarding the creation of a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells? Any volunteers? If Jesus did make such a promise to His disciples, those words of Jesus are not recorded in the New Testament. So which exceedingly great and precious promise is Peter referring to? We may find a clue in 2 Peter 3:1-2a. “Beloved, a now write to you this second epistle...that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets...” Perhaps when Peter

speaks in 2 Peter 3:13 about “according to His promise”, he is referring back one of the promises of God recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Perhaps Peter is thinking of the exceedingly great and precious promise recorded by the prophet Isaiah, 700 years earlier. Look with me at the promise of God recorded in Isaiah 65:17. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind (literally “come upon the heart”). And again in Isaiah 66:22, the Lord reminds us of His promise: “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD, “so shall your descendants and your name remain.”

That is an exceedingly great and precious promise of God. What do you say? God will create a new heavens and a new earth. So even though, as Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3, the elements will melt with fervent heat and all this shall be dissolved, we do not lose hope. We are a people of hope. We hold on to God’s exceedingly great and precious promise that He will create a new heavens and a new earth.

I’m fascinated by the last few words in 2 Peter 3:13—“nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth **in which righteousness dwells**” NKJV. How does that read in the NIV? “The home of righteousness.” What a beautiful picture! The place where righteousness finds a home. The home of the righteous. Literally, the place where righteousness settles down.

I’m tired of living in a world where evil dwells. Aren’t you? I could list some of the blatant evils of our day, but you don’t need to hear them. You know all too

well that we are living in a war zone. It's obvious every time you open a newspaper or watch the news. It's obvious every time you drive down the road and look at the billboards. We live in a world where evil dwells. But praise God, He is going to create a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

The apostle John was given a vision of that new heaven and new earth. He records his inspired testimony in Revelation 21, beginning with verse 1. "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea."

Look down to verse 4 of Revelation 21. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death." Someone ought to say "Amen" out there? No more death. No more terminal illness. No more homicide. No more suicide. No more feticide. No more infanticide. No more eldercide. No more genocide. This is a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The apostle John continues to describe this new heavens and new earth with these words: "there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain." No more broken bones. No more broken hearts. No more broken homes. No more broken lives. No more broken promises. This is the place where righteousness dwells. Hallelujah. There's a lot that I don't know about this new heavens and this new earth. But I believe the exceedingly great and precious promise of God.

But I don't want you to miss Revelation 21:3. This new heavens and new earth is called the home of righteousness, the place in which righteousness dwells

for another reason—not just because there is no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, and no more pain. This is the most beautiful part of the promise of God. Revelation 21:3. John records this inspired testimony of his vision of the new heavens and the new earth: “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.” I just have to use my favorite Hebrew word: Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

This new heavens and new earth is called the home of righteousness, the place in which righteousness dwells because the Lord our Righteousness will dwell with us there. Just think about that for a moment. We would be honored if for just one moment we could visit God’s home. But God has chosen to make His home with us.

No wonder we look with anticipation and eager expectation. Nevertheless, we look for a new heavens and a new earth. That’s the same verb, προσδοκᾶω, that we found in 2 Peter 3:12, “looking for...the coming of the day of God, with anticipation and eager expectation. We are also looking with anticipation and eager expectation for the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Is there anyone here today whom the enemy has beaten down? Maybe you’ve been on the brink of throwing up your hands in despair and saying, “What’s the use? It’s just too much for me.” I encourage you today to believe the exceedingly great and precious promise of God. He is going to create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. No more death, no more sorrow, no more

crying, no more pain. And best of all, God wants to spend eternity with you in that place where all things have been made new.

Can you imagine what it will be like when God creates a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells? Just dream your most glorious dream and you're only faintly beginning to imagine what God will prepare for those who love Him. Remember your most joyful moment and you are just skimming the surface of the limitless joys of the redeemed. Right after the exceedingly great and precious promise of God recorded in Isaiah 65:17, the Lord has this to say to us in Isaiah 65:18: "Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create!" **Be glad and rejoice forever, my brothers and sisters, because God wants to spend eternity with you.**

Don't you want to be there? It's not just wishful thinking. It's an exceedingly great and precious promise from God. And all of God's promises are true. All of them. I choose to believe the exceedingly great and precious promises of God today, don't you? Let your heart **be glad and rejoice forever because God wants to spend eternity with you.** We are a people of hope. Our future is bright. Soon we will join with the angelic host and cry out, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever."

Until that day, let us be about our Father's business. The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few. Let us cry out to the Lord of the harvest to throw out laborers into His harvest, and let us give Him permission to begin with us. For soon, and very soon, we are going to see the King. And when, in harmony with His

promise, God creates a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, we will be glad and rejoice forever. Not just because this mortal has put on immortality, not just because this corruptible has put on incorruption. **We will be glad and rejoice forever because God wants to spend eternity with us.**