

## Title: “Where Hope is Found”

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Revelation 21:1-4

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**Service Readings:** Acts 11:1–18, Rev. 21:1–7, John 16:12–22

*Where does our hope come from as we live in this seemingly hopeless world? It comes from here. Right here. Right now. It comes when we gather together in Christ's name and he descends from heaven to meet us. It comes when we meet him at his table and he offers us his body and blood. It comes from God's word when we read or hear Scripture.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Today's message is based on the passage from Revelation that was read earlier. As I prepared to preach on this passage, I found myself struggling with the best way to begin. Should I start with an illustration? Maybe an analogy about a new home. Should I maybe provide some background concerning John's life at the time he had these visions? So many options but every attempt I made seemed to fall flat. Nothing seemed to provide the proper foundation for what this Scripture passage is proclaiming.

The first idea that I had was to start with a history lesson about John experiencing this vision while exiled on a small island off the coast of Turkey by the Roman Empire. But that detail seems hardly applicable to us in this day and age. Our government doesn't practice this type of punishment and never has so there is not much there to connect to our lives. Unless, I suppose, one could draw a parallel between a physical exile and an emotional one. While the world turned, so to speak, John was left helpless to affect it. On the island, he couldn't respond to what was happening with those he loved. He couldn't address the needs of his family and friends and he couldn't influence society in the direction it had decided to travel. He simply couldn't do anything but quietly watch from the shore of the little island that he had been removed to.

At times we all have experiences in our own lives that feel much like John's. We hear stories of horror and destruction around the world but are helpless to affect or influence them in any way. Or we hear certain words from a doctor or employer and know that our world is falling apart and there is nothing that we can do to stop it from happening. Like John, all we can do is watch it unfold from the shores of our own personal island. Perhaps this would make a meaningful message, but it doesn't seem like the proper place to start because it describes a symptom more than a root problem.

And besides, how does our passage from Revelation even speak to it? Well, I suppose the answer to that question lies in the larger context of John's letter. Up to this point, chapter 21, his vision has been one of chaos. Chapter after chapter the images that he sees describe a world that is slowly falling apart. He sees sin permeating into every single corner of the world, into every action of

mankind. He sees Satan steadily tightening his grip over the earth and ever increasing in power. And in his own life he sees it play out in real time. Christians are being persecuted, many of the original disciples have been martyred, and for all he knows, he may be next. He also sees that Satan has not limited his activities to the church. Corruption and sin can be found everywhere – in government, in business, and in family life. Nothing is immune from his influence. John's vision shows this unfiltered and uncensored. And it is clear that the world will continue to decline and decay – the worst has not transpired. But then in chapter 20 a page is turned, a war is won, and Satan is defeated.

And then, chapter 21.

**21** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

You probably now have a sense of my conundrum. How do I begin? What could I possibly say to introduce this passage than just jumping to the main point? Maybe you have some suggestions in your mind about how I could start with a illustration around individual hopelessness, maybe a parent with a sick child. Or maybe something universal like the hopelessness that the direction of this world seems to be moving in. These are good ideas and I actually thought of starting there, too, especially as I read a quote from Bertrand Russell, some renowned philosopher and avowed atheist. He said, "[Humanity's] origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental [arrangements] of atoms." At first this seemed like a great place to start. Hopelessness is all around us, providing countless examples to draw from. But none of them seem fitting. They even seem to diminish John's message. He's not talking about hopelessness in this letter; that's not his main point. Instead, he is talking about a *response* to the hopelessness that we feel. Like the prophets of old who offered Israel hope during their darkest hours, John is doing the same for us in his letter. And so I think that a message of hope would be a more appropriate message than hopelessness.

But the problem with focusing on hope is that we must first know what we are hoping *for*. And we must know *why* we are hoping for it. And you see that we come back full-circle to where we began. How do we unpack John's message of hope in a way that fits into a single sermon? Where do we even begin? I suppose we could begin all the way back to Adam and Eve and the hope that God promised them just after they sinned. Or maybe move up several hundred years and start with the hope that God promised Noah after the flood. Even though creation was corrupt and had fallen short of God's expectation, he was full of mercy and promised that his creation would not be completely destroyed but would instead be redeemed. We might be able to start thousands of years after that with the exile of God's people from the slavery in Egypt. These were his chosen people whom he saved, whom he freed. And this was a foretaste for the coming Messiah. But even that seems to be farther back than we need to go. In this day and age, it seems that the farther back we go in time, the less connected we feel to the message. And right now, we need a connection to

God's message, especially one that has to do with hope. So, probably a good place to start would be the death and resurrection of Christ that John witnessed.

John's world had fallen apart when Jesus took his last breath. His hope was left dead on the cross; it had been extinguished and there would have been nothing he could do about it but begin to pick up the pieces of his life and start over. The despair that he must have felt that day would have been overwhelming. But how quickly it was replaced with hope when he saw Jesus resurrected! No longer did he search for meaning in the things of the world, for they were just temporary and unable to ever fill that need. Instead, he came to understand that the real meaning of life was found in the restoration of the broken relationship with God. This was the *telos* that man was driving towards! And the confidence, the hope for the realization of that goal was found only in the resurrected Christ. No longer was he searching for meaning; meaning had found him! Sure, he was living an exiled life. Sure, he might follow in the ways of the other disciples and be put to death. Yes, those were the realities of *this* world, this kingdom, but they were not the only realities. For John also seen the realities of God's kingdom – a kingdom where every tear would be wiped away, and where his true exile, the one that once separated him from God, would be fully reversed in a new earth. That was the hope that he captured in his letter. It was a hope that would sustain him through the daily troubles of his life.

But, back to preparing for this sermon, I still couldn't identify a good introduction and sometimes there is simply no more appropriate way to discuss a topic than to forego any contextual development and just jump right into the heart of the matter. So that is what I decided to do. No preamble, no introduction. Just the point. And the point is this: It all has to do with the hope that we have through Jesus' death and resurrection. And what is that hope? That hope is a promise. A promise that the pains of our lives have meaning. That the wrongs that people have done to us have meaning. That the loved ones that we have lost have meaning. It is a promise that the events of our lives, the terrible things that have happened to us have meaning. Hope is knowing that God will use even those terrible things for his good. Hope is clinging to the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection because we *know* that one day, when he returns, we will find that everything we have experienced, both the good *and especially the bad*, will have been used for God's glory. And on that day we will abandon all hope, not because hope is lost, but because hope is no longer needed. We will abandon all hope because we will have Jesus, and Jesus is all that we will need. And on that day "all we need" will personally wipe away every tear from our face. This is the John's message. It is a message of hope, but more than that, it is a message of promise. It is a message that promises to give meaning to every experience of our lives. And it is a message that the world needs to hear. It is a message that each of us needs to hear. And I have no idea how I can preach that message. And so I won't even try.

Please pray with me.

In Christ alone our hope is found  
He is our light our strength our song  
This Cornerstone this solid Ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled when strivings cease  
Our Comforter  
our All in All Here in the love of Christ we stand  
Amen.