

For Broadcast: 29th December 2019

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

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It has been said that a person can live 40 days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only one second without hope. No matter what we are facing, we all need hope.

I once observed a whole nation waiting in hope. I spent a year in New Zealand back in 1982. That year two experienced bushwalkers, out on a day walk near Mt Cook, got caught in a sudden snowstorm and disappeared. Day after day the rescue teams tried to mount an air search but more snowstorms and low cloud prevented that. Every day everyone in New Zealand listened to the news, hoping today would be the day they could send up a search plane. It was 10 long and anxious days before the weather cleared. By then some people had given up any hope of finding them alive. But there were also those longing for a miracle. The seemingly unlikely occurred: after 10 days of helplessly waiting the walkers had been spotted. They'd dug themselves a snow cave in which to shelter from the storms. They were rescued. It was reported that their only concerns were frostbite.

We are living in a world today where people long for hope yet many have no hope. Christians – followers of Jesus Christ – talk a lot about hope. But hope in what? And what do we mean when we talk of hope?

I believe that there is a God who made the world and knows you and me individually. This God wanted the human race to know him and have a relationship with us, so he sent his Son, Jesus, to live amongst us and make it possible to find our way back to God. Because of Jesus I believe my life and yours does have meaning and purpose. And it's that meaning and purpose that gives me hope – both now and for the future.

Dr. Viktor Frankl was an Austrian psychotherapist, university professor and prolific author who spent time interned in the Nazi death camps during WW2. His most widely read book, *Man's Search For Meaning*, was based on his observations of survivors of the Nazi death camps. Frankl observed that the main difference between those who survived the atrocities of the death camps and those who didn't was one single factor: Hope. Those who held onto hope, no matter how unlikely or far in the distant, were the ones who survived. Hope is everything.

The world has always been in desperate need of hope. Aristotle said: Hope is a waiting dream. Now if hope is just wishful thinking then it is a futile hope. A lot of wishful thinking is just wishing for something we know probably won't happen. It's often about wanting to change something we can't change.

Much of the time we try to find hope in stuff or even relationships that will not last. But the truth of the situation is:

- You won't find lasting hope in people or relationships. People invariably let us down.
- You won't find satisfying hope in politicians or government. Politicians rarely meet our expectations
- You won't find hope in accomplishments. Our achievements quickly fade.

- You won't find hope in Cosmopolitan or the Enquirer or Better Homes and Gardens. They deal mostly with shallow stuff rather than the real life.
- You won't find true hope in investments or finances. The GFC showed how quickly our nest eggs can be demolished.

What do you hope in?

As a Christian, I see hope as more than just wishful thinking. For me, to have hope is to wait for something with anticipation and expectation. There is an audacious element to hope – anticipation that God is going to act. It's about trust. I trust in Jesus. That forms the basis of my hope - my belief that God is a God who listens and acts.

For the Christian, like a coin, hope has two sides: It's hope for the future. And it's hope for now, today, this week: Christmas acknowledges and remembers Jesus' first coming. But embedded in that event is a hope for the future: Jesus came once. He will come again. Jesus will return and we will see Him again.

Jesus does make a difference to my daily life. Jesus does change my world right now. God does hear my prayers. God does care what happens to me.

Let me close with the rest of the story that I began with, the story about the two lost rangers in the New Zealand Alps. As I said earlier, it was ten days before they were found, long after some had given up hope. It was a good news story, but there was a bite to it. In this case it was frostbite. About a month later a small column in the news reported that their frostbite was so bad, both feet of both walkers had to be amputated. Their feet had literally died from the frostbite. So whilst it was good news the walkers were still alive, nevertheless, for the rest of their lives they would carry a grim reminder of their ordeal in getting caught in the mountains – having lost both feet.

I reckon this story is a good analogy of the state of the world and the human race. God has rescued the human race from death. Like those bushwalkers you and I have been saved, in this case, by Jesus. But the legacy of a world that lost touch with its maker remains. The terrible consequences of not knowing God remain, just as those bushwalkers no longer had their feet – a legacy of their ordeal in the mountains. For us, we see that legacy in the brokenness around us. Families shattered by a road death caused by a drunk driver. The pain of a broken marriage. The damage to reputations caused by a single false rumor spread on Facebook. These are all things that remind us we live in a world that is not right.

Yet, at the same time, there is good news. God has saved us. But more than that, he uses us, fallen and damaged creatures that we are, to bring good things into his world. We are wounded, but we are saved. We are damaged but we have hope. My hope for you as the new year unfolds is that you will embrace the hope that Jesus Christ offers you. And that hope makes all the difference!

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