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Speaker key

TH Trevor Hudson

TH Good morning, friends, it's good to be with you this morning as we continue the series. If I can invite you to get that leaflet out of your bulletin that you received as you entered the auditorium, I'd love to... I'd love us just to focus for a few moments on those words that Peter writes in the first letter, magnificent, magnificent words. Praise be, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in His great, great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish or spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you, for me, who, through faith, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

We thank God for those words and we pray that today God will speak to us through them. I don't know if you've seen The Shawshank Redemption. Someone before the service said to me, Trevor, I wasn't even born in '94. It's one of those old movies, one of those classics. My daughter, who is in her late 20s, saw it for the first time yesterday afternoon, and she said to me, now I know, dad, why you think it was such a great movie. And so I know that there may be a number of folk here who haven't seen the movie. I really recommend that you do see it. I'm not going to spoil it for you this morning.

It tells the story... Let me just give you a quick outline. It tells the story of a banker by the name of Andy, played by Tim Robbins, who is imprisoned for life for a crime that he didn't commit, and he is sent to this prison called Shawshank, and you can just imagine what it must be like to be sentenced to jail for life for a crime that you haven't committed, the discouragement, the despair, the dejection. And while he's in prison he meets another prisoner who's been there for some time, a guy by the name of Red. He is played by Morgan Freeman. And the two of them become very, very close friends through the movie.

But I think the major storyline of this movie is the theme of hope. And as you watch this movie you watch the banker, Andy, Tim Robbins, you watch him keeping hope alive even in the most desperate of circumstances, keeping hope alive in so many different ways. And near the end of the movie he writes a letter to Red, played by Morgan Freeman, and in that letter there is one line that really stood out for me, and it should go up on the screens. And I'd like you to look at it with me now. He writes,

he says, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of good things, and no good thing ever dies.

I think when we start speaking about hope we can see its relevance for our lives. It's very, very easy today to be caught up in a cycle of despair and discouragement. At a national level it happens very easily. I've just come back from teaching overseas for two weeks. I came back on Friday. And one of the things, one of the questions I get asked again and again and again overseas is, Trevor, what's it like living in South Africa. And I've got a standard answer. I always say to folk, you know, on Monday I hope, on Tuesday I despair, on Wednesday I hope, on Thursday I despair, that it's almost like this rollercoaster that we're on between hope and despair, hope and despair.

Yesterday I just looked at my Twitter timeline quickly, and when I just went through all the news yesterday that was going on in this country I, kind of... it was, kind of, despair, but I woke up this morning and I was hopeful. At a personal level it's very easy to get caught in a cycle of despair and discouragement. Sometimes we just feel so discouraged about our marriage. We wonder whether it's ever going to come right. Some of us are caught up in work situations sometimes that can just really rob us of hope. Some of us are maybe doing a course of studies, and you just want to... you want to throw it in.

When I got back on Friday I got an email from a lawyer. She's in her early 40s, and I've walked with her now for many years, and she's doing some postgraduate work. And in this email she said, Trevor, it's just getting too much. I just want to... I want to give it up now. I just want to give it up now. I don't know if you today, as you sit here, I don't know if you today are caught up in this spiral of discouragement and despair and dejection. I don't know. Maybe you're in your own Shawshank prison of depression, of discouragement, of despair. And what I want to do, very simply, is I want to highlight for us today the challenge of this movie, which is to keep hope alive, to keep hope alive.

I'm sure you know that hope is a biblical word. It's a word that comes up in the Bible again and again and again. I want to share with you quickly my three favourite texts about hope, and if you're taking notes I hope you will jot down these three readings, magnificent readings. And the first is from Corinthians, and you know this so well, where Paul writes, in Corinthians, and he says there are three things that remain, three things that last forever: faith, hope, and love. I want you to notice that hope is in the middle of faith and love. It's in the middle. It holds faith and love together.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us a beautiful image of hope. Just look at this image that he gives us in Hebrews chapter six. He says we have this hope; here comes the image, as an anchor, as an anchor for the soul. I love that image of hope: an anchor that, when the storms come, the seas get rough hope is an anchor for the soul. Hope gives our soul a sense of wellbeing. It's when there's hope that we can say, even in darkness it is well with my soul. It is an anchor.

But my favourite, favourite passage about hope is the one that I read to you just a while ago where Peter, writing to some early... some early Christians, says to them,

praise be... praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I love these words, who gives us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that our hope isn't wishful thinking, our hope is rooted in the resurrection of Christ. Our hope is rooted in this God who raised Christ from the dead, that we worship a God who has done His best work in a graveyard.

Those verses have been going around and around and around in my head, and I've been thinking about hope and how we keep hope alive, especially if we're discouraged, and I've got a few thoughts I want to share with you, just a few thoughts, and I'm praying today that, as I share these thoughts with you, that the Spirit of God will infuse, breathe hope again into our own hearts and minds and lives. And I want to start with the power of hope, just the power of hope. Hope is a very powerful thing.

Now, one of my favourite philosophers, his name is Lewis Smedes, he is a philosopher and thought ethics [?] [unclear] for many years, and he has a wonderful sentence. He says that hope is for the human spirit what oxygen is for the body. Would you agree with that, that hope is for the human spirit what oxygen is for the body? It empowers us. My mum, when we were small, always used to say to me, Trevor, where there's... where there's life there's hope. I would want to say to her if I could, mum, where there's hope there's life. Where there's hope there's life. Hope empowers us.

Hope empowers us to reach out for a dream. Hope gets us writing the first line of a book. Hope starts us on a course of study. Hope empowers us to start a new business. Hope gets me sending out my CV again and again and again. Hope gets the couple who are struggling in their marriage to go for therapy together. Hope gets someone who is battling with alcohol to AA, hoping that maybe change can come. Hope empowers us. Hope will get me going to Ellis Park next week that the Kings will beat the Lions. Hope is a powerful thing, a powerful thing.

I don't know if you know the name Ed Dobson. Ed Dobson was a minister in North America of a very large church called the Calvary Church. In the year 2000 he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. I don't know if you know that, A L S. It's a disease that attacks the muscles of your body. It's a degenerative disease. It's incurable. And he was given two years, two to four years, to live. He gave up his church immediately. He didn't want people to see him deteriorate Sunday by Sunday by Sunday.

About six months after his diagnosis he had an encounter with a New York cab driver, taxi driver who he knew quite well, and he somehow had the freedom to tell this taxi driver what was happening in his body and the decision that he had made to give up ministering. And the taxi driver just spoke to him one sentence. The taxi driver said to him, Ed, it ain't over until it's over. It ain't over until it's over. And in that moment in Ed's body and heart and mind hope was born again. It ain't over until it's over. It's 2,000 now and 13. Ed is still alive. He's seen his daughter get married. He's written two books. He's got four grandkids. It's the power of hope. It's the power of hope, and I'm praying that today God may breathe again into our hearts and lives the power of hope.

But let me say something else about hope. I want to also speak about the pain of hope, the pain of hope. There come moments when our hopes crash. You know that. I know that. And it's a painful thing when hopes crash on the rocks of reality. I think of a couple that I know well who longed for a child for ten years, and they hoped and hoped and hoped. They were told they weren't going to have kids. They went down all the different avenues. Ten years into marriage she fell pregnant, Doris fell pregnant. And they took out the champagne and they drank a toast to hope. And early in the pregnancy the doctor called them in and said to them there are complications. He explained the scenario. He felt that they needed to terminate the pregnancy. But they decided not to. They decided they would hope.

And so she went through her pregnancy and she gave birth to a baby boy, and the boy was fine. And they took out the champagne again, and they drank a toast to hope. And four days later the child died. And in that moment human hopes crash. And when they crash we can go in one of two directions. We can either... we can either say I will never hope again. We can move into a deep cynicism and discouragement and despair, and I think God understands that sometimes. Or when human hopes crash we can allow our broken human hopes to push us down into a deeper hope, a divine hope, what I'm going to call the promise of hope.

In the Bible God has made a promise, and this promise has got two parts to it, and I'm going to make it very simple. On the one side of the promise God promises us, promises us a new heaven and a new earth. I have looked at the last book of the Bible. In the end God wins. Death does not win. Tragedy does not win. Sickness does not win. Evil does not win. Sin does not win. In the end God wins. And the promise that he makes to us in Christ is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that all will be well. That is a promise that God makes us. And that's one side of the promise. And the other side of the promise is that when human hopes crash God is with us in the dark.

I think of Christ on the cross. Do you remember that moment when He cries out, My God, My God, why have You forsaken me? In that moment God... Christ felt abandoned. But in that moment, in that forsaken moment, in that dark moment God was at work preparing a resurrection, and somehow when I look at the cross it helps me to know that when I'm in the darkness of hopes crashing God is in the dark with me, at work, preparing some kind of little resurrection for me. And I want you to know that today, especially those of you perhaps who are living right now in the midst of crashed hopes, keeping hope alive, the power of hope. Some of us need that power today. The pain of hope, some of us are experiencing that today, and then the promise of hope, the promise.

How do I end? Can I end very practically? Can I invite you now, as we leave, as we go back into what... our day, can I invite you to take a step in your life to keep hope alive? And I don't know what that step is. Maybe some of you today need to go into the chapel, the Klipkerk, and maybe you need to go to God and say to God, God, I have allowed despair and discouragement to become too much part of my life, and I want to confess that, and I want to give it to You today, my despair and my discouragement.

Maybe some of us need to take a little step that, every day, maybe for 31 days... I looked at a... I watched a Ted Talk a few days ago. Sometimes if you practice something for 31 days it can just start a new habit, that maybe for 30 days each day you will practice hope. You will have a hope for that day. Today I hope. And have a hope that is specific, just for that day. Just practice hoping so that it can become a habit again. Maybe that's something God is asking you to do.

Maybe God is asking some of you to stop living by fate, by fate. Some of us become so fatalistic. What will be will be. When we don't live by fate we live by faith, and we live by faith in Christ who has conquered the grave. We are delivered from fatalism, and Christ loves that in us. He liberates us to live with a new faith rather than with a fatalism. Maybe that's the step you are going to take. But maybe the big step, it's a very big step, is to allow Christ today into your life. Paul says when Christ is in us He becomes the hope of glory, and I want to ask you to think very seriously of allowing the resurrected Jesus Christ into your own heart and mind today, so that in your life and my life He may give us a new and living hope. Praise be... praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, in His great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope that can neither spoil nor fade nor perish. Let's pray together.

Dear God, often on a Sunday when we gather here we speak about things that are very important. And You have a wonderful way, Lord, of coming to us in worship as we sing, as we listen to the song, as we watch things on the screen, as we sit in the silence, as we read scripture. So often you come to us. Come to us today, Lord, in our discouragement, in our despair, in our dejection. Come and breathe into us, dear Christ, Your living hope, that we may again discover the power of hope in our lives. And that we may also discover Your presence in those places where our hopes have crashed. Come, Lord Jesus, speak to us today. And may this Sunday become a new beginning to new beginnings of keeping hope alive. This is our prayer that we offer to You with all the love and longing of our heart, in the name of Jesus, and we say together as God's people, amen.

May the hope of Jesus Christ be with you.