

## The Second Sunday After the Epiphany

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### Christian Hope

Lessons Referenced: Genesis 29:1-28; Ephesians 1:15-23

Last week we looked at God's choice of us. Not because of our goodness. In fact He chose us before the foundation of the world to be Sons in Christ and this should make us profoundly humble and grateful. In last week's lesson from Genesis 25:19-34 we saw Jacob, the one chosen by God, with his brother Esau who despised his inheritance and sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentils.

Esau had no self control. He was a creature of impulse and "of the moment." He had to have what he wanted and he had to have it now.

Contrast this with the behavior of Jacob. While he too had definite strong desires – he really wanted to marry Rachel – he subordinated those desires to what is necessary: work, getting sheep, winning Laban's respect.

Esau had no hope; he literally couldn't hope because he couldn't wait. Jacob was full of hope. He is a "type;" the type of the hopeful Christian.

God gives us our hope for His purposes.

1. He gives us the Hope: God brought Jacob to Rachel and Jacob fell in love with her.
2. He gives us a taste of the thing hoped for: Jacob must have seen her for years, drinking in her beauty.
3. Then God sets us to work for the hope: Jacob labors for 7 years – oops 14 years – building sheep folds, moving the flock, digging the weeds, fighting the wolves, tending the sick sheep, finding water, finding the lost sheep.
4. We are at last given the object of our hope: Jacob marries Rachel.
5. Fruitfulness all along the way: Jacob has 12 sons who became a nation, the chosen people, the people through whom God brought Jesus the Savior.

Hope as manifest in a believer will bear fruit beyond our wildest dreams

It is just so in the Christian life

1. God gives us the hope of knowing Him and the glorious life to which He calls us.
2. He gives us a taste of the hope. He gives us the Holy Spirit “as a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.”
3. He sets us to work for the hope. What work? The work of repenting; the work of denying ourselves; the work of loving Him and loving others in deed; lifting our hands to do the work of service and evangelism.
4. God reveals all so that what we see dimly now we will know fully then when we see Him face to face.
5. Fruitfulness along the way: Christian witness makes Christian believers, people in God’s love and joy for eternity. Again, there is fruitfulness beyond our wildest dreams.

### The Culture of Hopelessness

Drive along 8 Mile Road on the northern border of Detroit and you will see a liquor store, a strip club, a church, an adult book store, a car repair shop, a shoe shop, a strip club, a church. Hopelessness is punctuated every once in a while by hope. But let’s look more closely at what should be signs of hope: the churches. The divorce rate among Evangelical Christians is 31%; in the whole country it is 32%. From this it’s clear that hopelessness has infected our churches as well.

“God can’t help me,” we cry. Well, He can’t if we won’t let Him help us!

God spoke to me on this topic this past week. This is what I believe he said, “Allen, most of the time as leader you are hopeless and show this chronic hopelessness in your interactions with people that assume no change in the status quo. When you ask someone to do something and they say ‘No,’ you just nod your head and smile and move on. A hopeful person lays out the vision to those whom he leads.”

A hopeful person is not discouraged by set backs.

A hopeful person is not a fool sidetracked by the latest thought fad (get rich, get successful, etc.) scheme.

A hopeful person has wisdom and understanding, has an enlightened heart – a heart that sees the truth of who God is.

A defeated Christian is a contradiction.

A hopeless despairing believer is an oxymoron.

So your circumstances are tough. When did God ever promise to make life easy for you? If you were told that God would take away your problems, you were lied to. I apologize to you if I ever said that to you, and I apologize on behalf of the clergy who may have said it. It is a lie. God promises in Christ to be with us in our difficulties, not to snap His fingers and take them away.

Self pity runs rampant in Christian circles in older and younger believers. Pastors want to love so they go along. It is time for self pity, for navel gazing, and for obsession with our own circumstances to stop. It is time to stop acting like spoiled children who don't get their way. It is time to stop sulking and crying and despairing and whining.

St. Paul writing his letter to the Ephesians writes it as a prisoner of Rome. He hoped in the Lord. Things got worse for him. He trusted in the Lord. They kicked him out of the synagogue. He preached the Lord Jesus and hope in Him, and the people of Damascus hated him so much that his friends had to lower him in a basket down the outside of the city wall. Chased from one town to the next, Paul never gives up his hope in the Lord because he knew in whom he believed. He writes from jail to the Ephesians: “that you may know the hope to which He has called you.” (Verse 18b)

So your circumstances are tough. You are losing money. You have family that won't talk to you. You have something in your life not going your way.

Was your hope in an easy life?

Was your hope in financial security?

Was it not in the one who rose from the dead? Was it not in the one who can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine?

Jesus Christ is beyond all this. Oh, I don't mean He's “above” it all. In fact He went through it all!

He was born in a manger because he had no home

He had to flee to Egypt because Herod wanted Him dead.

He followed His Father, and He was spit upon, whipped and crucified.

But DEATH DID NOT STOP HIM.

And now in the midst of the muck and the mess, we see Him standing on the rock, reaching His hand out to us.

Paul is not writing to those whose lives were secure. He is writing to people whose very allegiance to Christ was leading them into danger. But so what!

They had found the one who had conquered death!

They had found the person in whose service is perfect freedom.

They had found the one who had freed them from addiction.

They had found the pearl of great price, forgiveness from the Father and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

They had everything and so their circumstances, difficult as they were, had no control over the joy in their lives.

They had become “prisoners” – not of this world, – but “of hope.”

Oh I pray my brothers and sisters, oh I pray that you may know the hope to which He has called you! That you would see the riches of your glorious inheritance! That you would understand the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe!

The Father who raised Jesus from the dead is not powerless when it comes to your life!

The Son who died and rose again has conquered death, paid for sins and shaken hell. He will never be defeated. His armies will not be vanquished. His light will never be snuffed out.

The world is waiting for the Sons of God to walk in hope.

The world is watching for the heirs of God to be seated with Christ and act like heirs.

Are you hoping in Christ? The world that so desperately needs the witness of Christ is watching the object of your hope.

Are your eyes up or down?

Are you overcoming obstacles in pursuit of the One thing of consequence or are you stopped and stymied by every circumstance.

God and Father, give this people a Spirit of Wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of you. Open the eyes of our hearts.

If you have not put your hope in the Lord, you can do that today.

If you have put it on the Lord in the past but managed to forget and begun to compromise, you have watered down your loyalty to the Lord and allowed other things to grab the love of your heart.

Please pray with me.....