

## ANCHORED

9th in a Series on Ephesians called, "Messages to the Misfits"  
Ephesians 2:11-13

Back in 2001 a powerful movie came out entitled *To End All Wars*. It was based on the real life experience of Ernest Gordon, a British soldier who was captured by the Japanese early in World War II. He was sent to a prisoner of war labor camp in Southeast Asia. He and his fellow prisoners had to endure incredible brutality, privation, torture and hardship at the hands of their captors. At one point in the story Gordon became seriously ill and almost died. He only survived because of the sacrificial efforts of another prisoner named Dusty Miller. There is a scene in which Miller is trying to feed him, but he has pretty much lost the will to go on. A couple of soldiers come to him looking for help. They are struggling, saying, "What's the purpose in what we've been suffering? Where's the justice in the enemy beating us and working us to death?" They, too, are on the verge of giving up. But Gordon says, "Please, just leave me alone." He doesn't feel like he has it in him to help them. Dusty waits until they've left, then says to him, "A man can endure an incredible amount of pain and suffering if he has hope. When he loses hope, that's when he dies."

Eventually Gordon regains hope, largely through the sacrifice of Dusty Miller, and begins to inspire hope in the other prisoners. They are able to go on and survive the inhumanity and brutality. That line is powerful and true. There is no end to what we can go through if we have hope. But if we lose hope, we give up, we quit, we die. Today let's think about hope. Hope is a crucial idea in Ephesians 2:11-13.

### WE WERE HOPELESSLY ON THE OUTSIDE

The majority of the believers in Christ in Ephesus were Gentiles. Paul has just written about the amazing thing God had done in rescuing these believers. They had been dead spiritually, and God made them alive in Christ. This was all by God's grace, not of their doing. He wanted to impress upon them what a gracious act this was. So he reminded them of what it meant for them to be spiritually dead Gentiles. He used several different phrases to describe their plight.

They were separate from Christ. Obviously prior to Paul's arrival in Ephesus they had likely never heard of Jesus. They probably knew some Jewish people, and may have been vaguely aware that in their curious religion with its one God they had some kind of hope that an "anointed one," a Messiah, would come and help them somehow.

They may have heard about the Jews' Messiah, but they almost certainly knew nothing of Jesus whatsoever. In many ways it is astounding that these people believed in Jesus. Some unknown wood worker from a no name village in a backward part of Palestine was not just the Jewish Messiah, but the one true God in human form, come to rescue the world? That was a highly unlikely story. I suspect this is why God gave Paul and others some miracles to validate their message. The upshot of all of this was they knew little to nothing of the one God of Israel or of Messiah. The whole idea was pretty much irrelevant to them, so they had no relationship to God at all.

Obviously since they were not Jewish they were excluded from citizenship in Israel. This meant that they also were “foreigners to the covenant of promise.” A covenant is an agreement, an arrangement or relationship, a bit like a contract. The Old Testament has a number of these arrangements. It started with Abram. God told him he would bless him and make of him a people through whom he would bless all peoples. Abram had a covenant relationship with God that included this promise that God would be his God and would bless him and use him and his descendants. Later God made a covenant with those descendants that God would be their God and they would be his people. The stipulation was they were to keep his commands. In Exodus 19:5-6 God said, “out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” With that came the promise of God’s blessing.

The Gentiles were not part of that covenant. I was totally shocked when the Padres signed top free agent infielder Manny Machado and agreed to pay him \$300,000,000 over the next 10 years. That’s \$30,000,000 per year. That is a whopping amount of money. It means he makes over \$185,000 per game. Laurie and I have some financial issues we are facing, so I called the Padres and asked them if they would just send me a check equal to one game’s worth of income for Manny. I figure that would be no big deal since he’s making 30 million a year. Do you know how much you have left if you take 185,000 out of 30 million? You have about 30 million. How do you suppose that went when I requested that from the Padres? Actually I never called them because while Manny has a contract, an arrangement, a covenant with the Padres, I am excluded from that covenant and its promises. So not only are they not going to give me \$185,000, they aren’t going to give me anything. They owe me zero. Just as I have no claim on the Padres because I have no covenant with them, so Gentiles had no claim on God’s promises because they had no covenant with him.

Paul sums up the plight of those ancient Ephesians and of all of us prior to God bringing us into his kingdom through Christ by saying they were “without hope and without God” in this world. The words “without God” are a translation of one Greek word. It is the word *atheos*. It is the root of our word “atheist.” But those ancient Ephesians weren’t atheists. They believed in lots of gods and goddesses. Remember they had that famous temple to the goddess Artemis there, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Paul’s point was it does no good to have as many fake gods as you can manufacture. The only thing that matters is having a covenant relationship with one God that is real. And they didn’t have that.

Laurie and I had a very cool blessing when our children were adults but not yet married. We took a family vacation the summer before Carissa entered her senior year of high school and we thought it would be the last family vacation we would have. To our delight, we got to take several vacations with the two of them after they got out of college. We all went to Disney World together one year. And we got to have several trips to Hawaii. All of us love Hawaii, as you know, and they loved it when we made it possible for them to join us there. We had some great times together. We have lots of memories of those times. But there was always for them a longing that we could not fulfill. They had each other and us to enjoy this special place with. But what they really wanted was to go to that special place with that one person that mattered most of all. They wanted to be able to enjoy it with a

spouse they loved, and nothing else could satisfy that longing. What a huge blessing and joy it was when four years ago we got to have a vacation in that spot with them and their spouses.

The point of all that is that they wanted and longed for the one special person to share life with. Nothing else could fill that empty place. Paul's point was that even when they didn't know it, what the Ephesians were longing for was the one true God. Nothing else and no one else could satisfy that longing. So they experienced what we all do when we are without God, and that is that ache, that knowledge that something is missing. God has created us for himself. He put into us all a need for him. Nothing can fix that except having a covenant relationship with him and experiencing his love and acceptance.

God is the source of all life, all good and all love. To be without him is to be connected to the source of life, good and love. That doesn't mean you will never experience anything good or any love. Think of it this way. In our back yard we have a faucet. Connected to that faucet is a hose. The hose is designed to be screwed right onto the faucet. If the hose is not connected to the faucet it is possible to still get some water into the hose. You can turn the water on and hold the opening of those hose under the faucet. Some of the water will go into the hose. But what the hose is made for is to be directly connected so that water can flow freely through the hose, so the faucet can literally fill the hose with water and have it come gushing out the other end. We are created by God to be directly connected to him so that his life, his goodness and his love flow fully, unhindered, into us. So it flows through us and comes gushing out to other people. When we are disconnected from him, his goodness and love still flow, but we are only going to experience it as a trickle.

Not having that relationship with God meant they were without hope in this world. Oh, they had hopes. Like every human being, they had lots of hopes. They hoped they would have enough food to eat. They hoped they could have children and that their children would be healthy. They hoped they could have friends. They hoped they wouldn't get some terrible disease. They hoped that their gods could somehow help them. Paul's point again is that they had no hope of changing their situation of being without God, excluded from his promises. And that meant they had no hope of eternal life. It meant they had no hope of making sense out of life and of filling that big hole that they sensed was at the core of their soul.

That expression is a fine summation of the human condition. To be without hope and without God, with no way of altering the situation is a painful and tragic way to live. It impacts the soul, and eventually creates terrible distortion. It is at the core of the spiritual deadness that Paul has been discussing since the beginning of this chapter. Our daughter in law, Anna, served as the agent for some people who bought a house up in Orange County last week. The sale proved to be a difficult experience. The people selling the house made it as unpleasant as the process could be. When they finally vacated the house, which they delayed beyond the contracted date, they left it in as much of a mess as possible. There were rat and dog droppings inside the house and the people left obscene words scrawled on mirrors and walls. It was appalling. Why would anyone be that awful? That is because there is pain in their souls. That pain starts with being disconnected from God. That was an

example of what can happen when souls are spiritually dead, cut off from God. That was extreme, but cut off from God, there is no limit to how bad things can get.

What happens to us when we are without hope? Hope is the basis of patience, determination, courage, motivation and perseverance. Hope makes hardships more bearable. If we have hope we can get through almost anything. But if we do not have hope, we will lack all of those things. Hardships become unbearable. They loom as insurmountable obstacles. We become impatient. We lose heart. We lose motivation to keep going. Why try when there is no hope? And finally, we will not persevere. We will just give up. In the end all we will have is disappointment, bitterness and despair.

I was sitting with my granddaughter, Ella, as she was drawing. At one point she drew an approximation of a circle. I, said, “Ella, let me teach you how to draw a Mickey Mouse. All it takes is three circles like that one.” She said, “No, I don’t want to.” I asked, “Why not?” She said, “I can’t do it.” She had attempted on her own to do that and was frustrated that she failed. She had no hope that she could accomplish it, so she didn’t even want to try.

Our son in law, Michael flew into Lindbergh Field yesterday. This is significant because Michael had never flown into Lindbergh Field before and Lindbergh has a tricky approach. *Travel & Leisure* magazine said, “The final approach to Lindbergh Field is about as white knuckle as it gets at major US airports.” The approach is very steep. I’ve known that for a long time. What I didn’t know was that there are very strict regulations about how you make that descent, and if you violate one of those guidelines even for a little bit you are going to have to be making a report about it. Since Michael had never been in a cockpit on an approach to San Diego, he was a little nervous about the fact that he was scheduled to fly the landing. He talked to his captain about it, thinking it might be best if he observed the approach first, but the captain said, “Oh, you can do this, no problem.” Michael has tons of experience and is one of the best pilots in the world. So though he was nervous, he had hope that he could do it. And he did indeed land that plane. Hope makes it possible for us to keep moving forward. And if you have no hope in this life, eventually you are going to be a very disillusioned, disheartened, cynical person.

## WE WERE INCLUDED BY GOD

Verse 13 starts with those beautiful words, “But now.” Verses 11-12 painted a bleak, hopeless picture. But verse 13 is like the sunrise after a dark night. But now, something has changed that whole picture. We, who were on the outside with no hope of changing our condition, have been brought into God’s kingdom by what Jesus Christ did for us.

This is not something we have done by our effort. Just as early in this chapter Paul said we were spiritually dead, but now God has made us alive in Christ, he says once again that God has acted to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He has brought us into the covenant God has with his people. He has made us part of his people. Jesus Christ earned this right for us and has given it to us as a gift. It came at great cost. It required that Jesus’ blood be spilled, his life sacrificed. But he made that sacrifice so that we might be part of God’s kingdom. He did it so that we would no longer be

without God. He has made us his children, forever doted upon and welcomed by him into his presence.

This means we have been connected to God so that his life, his goodness and his love can flow into us unimpeded. And this means that we are no longer without hope. We have hope because we are included, because we are loved, because we live connected to God. Romans 15:13 calls God, “the God of hope.” If we are living connected to him that hope will flow into us and fill our lives.

But what is this hope? What can we hope for? Does this mean that we have hope that no matter what happens in the end it is going to work out happily for us? Does it mean that we have hope that whatever we attempt will eventually succeed? No, that’s not what our hope is. What then can we actually put our hope in?

### **We are securely in God’s family.**

Hebrews 6:19 is the foundational verse for our church. It says, “we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” What hope? In the context the writer talked about how Jesus is our high priest, who has made a way for us to enter into the very presence of God. He is there advocating for us.

The hope is that we are beloved by God, and nothing can change that. Where once we were on the outside, now we are included, and that inclusion is forever. The truth that is so often overlooked by people, or simply not believed, is that the fundamental issue of life for every human is to be connected to God, to have his life and his love flowing fully into us. The lack of that is at the heart of all dysfunction. It is the base of all of the difficulty of the human condition. We will never be filled with life, we will never be at peace, until that problem is solved. People identify a million different things as that great need they have, but it ultimately always comes back to the need to be accepted, loved by God, be intimately connected to him. And the problem is on our own ability we have no hope of ever establishing that connection.

That problem is solved for us by Jesus. He did what was necessary to reconnect us to the Father, and to be totally loved and accept. The issue is settled once and for all in Christ, so we need never fear that God is going to reject us because we are not measuring up. The whole message of Ephesians 2 is that we couldn’t measure up, but God has done it for us. So Romans 8:1 says, “therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” There is no condemnation, zero, nada, nil, ever. We are secure in God’s love, from which we will never be separated according to Romans 8:38-39.

In his commentary on Hebrews Philip Hughes wrote, “in the early days of the church, in the midst of physical insecurity and persecution, the anchor was adopted as the symbol of Christian hope and certainty. The anchor of hope, as Aquinas observes, ‘fixes the soul firmly in God in this world.’”

There may be times when we feel like God is absent, that he doesn’t hear or answer our prayers, that life has gone sideways and God has done nothing to protect us. It is in these times we must hold onto that anchor. Though we may not understand the storm and why it is happening, we can always know

that God has not abandoned us, for he never will. The storm will eventually pass, and we will see again the goodness of our God.

### **We have eternal life**

Titus 3:5-7 says God, “Saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says, “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.” We have hope. We know that our loved ones in Christ will live again, and so will we.

There is no gift greater than the gift of eternal life, for there is no curse more ominous and grievous than death. We are guaranteed that gift because of what Christ has done for us. Some time ago I happened to read something I wrote a number of years ago. At the time our beloved dog, Luke, was still alive. Toby was home from college. One night, Toby is on the floor in front of the fireplace and Luke was lying next to him. Toby was petting him. Toby said, “I really love Luke. I hope I am not living here when he dies.” He knew Luke was getting older and he could see where that was inevitably going to end. He didn’t want to have to experience it because death is so awful.

Well Laurie and I lived through the death of Luke. We also lived through the death of our first son, Joel, and the death of my dad, and the devastating deaths of the children of a number of our friends. There are many sad and hard things that happen to people in this world. But death eclipses them all.

Imagine that you are diagnosed with cancer. That’s bad news, but it gets worse. Imagine that the doctor says, “I am very sorry, but it is Stage 4 cancer, it has spread, and there is nothing we can do.” You are confronted with the ultimate reality. You are going to die and there is no hope of avoiding that. Then suppose that a person comes to see you and says, “I know about your condition. But I have been seeking a cure for it for many years. In the last two months we have had a breakthrough. We have found a cure. I will give you the evidence so you know this is not a scam. I can offer you a cure, but I will tell you that insurance does not cover it and it is terribly expensive.” How much would you be willing to pay to be given life? How important would that hope be to you?

Our hope isn’t precisely like that, but it is similar. It is a 100% sure cure for death. The cost was more than any of us can calculate, but Jesus has paid the price for us and now offers it to us free of charge. This is not a sort of life, an existence as a disembodied spirit floating around in clouds somewhere. It is life as God always intended for us, life in its most glorious form. It is life with beauty and strength restored, physical life without fear or the ravages of a fallen world full of broken people. It is life as we wish it could be. Our hope isn’t that maybe this life can be a little less disappointing or painful. It is that we will live eternally in the kingdom of God where there is no more sorrow and no more tears, but only joy. And it is guaranteed. This is a hope more precious than any other hope we could ever have.

## **Our lives will not be wasted**

Romans 5:3-5 says, “We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

That’s a whole sermon full of thoughts. We don’t have time to go through all of it, but we can see this. God is using even the hard things in our lives to shape us and change us and use us for his purposes and his glory. And when it is all said and done we will not be put to shame. We will see that it was all worth it.

Many years ago while I was still in grad school a woman came and spoke to the church I was involved in. It was a mega church with a terrific pastor, one of the best speakers I have ever heard. I loved going to church and hear him teach God’s word. But one Sunday we had a visiting speaker. It was an elderly woman who spoke with a pronounced accent. As a young man in his 20’s this was not typically the type of person I would be anxious to hear. Hey, she’s an old lady, what could Grandma have to say to us? But I wanted to hear this woman. And I can tell you that when she spoke it was very quiet in the building. There was a hushed reverence that you could feel. It was almost like no one wanted to move for fear of violating that sense of the sacred. The woman’s name was Corrie Ten Boom. What made her so powerful and caused such huge respect for her, was that she had suffered some of the worst the world can inflict. She and her family had helped Jews escape the Nazis during World War II, but they eventually were arrested. The family was sent to Nazi concentration camps where they endured hardship that cannot be fully described. She and her sister Betsie ended up in the notorious Ravensbruck camp. Shortly before she died Betsie told her, “There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.” A couple of weeks after Betsie’s death, Corrie was released. She learned later that her release was due to a clerical error, and that a week after she left all of the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers.

Corrie found that even in that unimaginable horror God had not abandoned her. And she also found that God did not waste that experience. The hard things she went through opened doors for ministry for her, and gave her credibility and power that humbled everyone who encountered her.

Whatever may happen in our lives, God will use. Romans 8:28 says he will bring some good out of it, and he will use it to make us more effective as heralds of his glory. Nothing in your life will ever be wasted. God may be using it in ways you won’t see. Think of Job, who went through unimaginable, crushing losses. What he never knew was that God was using it to teach us today, and to prove to Satan that there was a man on the planet who truly served God.

The hardest thing for us is to go through things that are totally meaningless. How many times have you heard kids complain about having to do “busy work” for homework? They know there is no point to what they are doing. It’s senseless, and that makes it useless and a trial. What we can know is that nothing you ever deal with in life is busy work. God is using every bit of it.

When I was a junior in high school nearing the end of the baseball season I and a couple of my friends on the baseball team were getting to the place where the whole thing was a trial. We were the scrubs on the team, the guys who sat on the bench game after game. We had to go to practice every day, but we knew there was no point to it. The coach had made it crystal clear that a snowball had a better chance of surviving a summer in Bakersfield than we did of seeing a single moment of playing time in a game. What was the point of batting and fielding practice when we would never, ever bat or field? It wasn't fun, and it did no good whatsoever. It was meaningless, and so it had turned into drudgery. An odd thing happened. One game around the 4th inning I was behind the dugout being the bullpen catcher for a pitcher who was warming up. Suddenly the coach yelled out, "Myatt!" I said, "Yes, Coach, I'm here." He said, "You're in." I was confused. I didn't know what he meant. I said, "Uh, in what?" Impatiently he said, "The game, of course." I thought the "of course" was totally inappropriate. Me being in a game was the farthest thing from an "of course" sort of event. It was more rare than the arrival of Halley's Comet. But the guy playing second base ahead of me had his arm cut open when he was trying to tag a runner whose spikes hit his arm. He was out, and that left...me! I ran out to second base a bit shaken and nervous and thought, "Now what?" Well, do what you've been practicing for all these months. That practice wasn't wasted after all. That's how life is for us. Nothing in your life, not one single thing, will be wasted. God will use it all.

### **God will sustain us**

Isaiah 40:31 is a familiar verse. People quote it all the time as a motto for their Christian school athletic teams. But it's way more than a motto. It is a hope that we need just to get through our days. "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Through 40 years of ministry I can tell you that this verse has been tested. I've had numerous occasions when I thought, "Well this is a complete waste of time, and I'm a total failure. Why even try?" That typically happens when I start comparing, looking at results, or when I'm doing lots of things because I'm afraid if I don't people will think poorly of me. When I do those things inevitably I don't soar on eagles wings. I crawl in worm trails and feel sorry for myself.

Here's the amazing thing. When I hope in the Lord, when I just say, "Lord, I'm just going to be faithful to you. I'm going to give the best I have and I'm going to do what you have given me to do. I'm not going to worry about how I look or what someone thinks. I'm just going to be faithful and let you do with me whatever you want." When I do that I find freedom. I find rest. I find I can keep going, be joyful and thankful. I can run and not grow weary.

Jesus said at the end of Matthew 28:20, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." I know, don't call me Shirley. In the original text that's more vivid than it comes out in English. The word translated "surely" actually is a command. It is literally, "Look!" It is an attention getter. It's like people yelling out "Heads up" when a baseball is traveling in your direction. It means, "Pay attention!" Jesus was saying, "Hey, heads up, I will be with you always."



This is an amazing hope. Jesus is right here with you today, as he is every moment of every day of your life. He has not left this world. He is right with us. He wants us to know we are never alone. He is with us, will give us the strength we need to keep going if we keep our hope in him.

### APPLICATION

So we have hope. What difference should that make? What should we do?

#### PURIFY OURSELVES

1 John 3:3 says, “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” Purify your heart and life so that it becomes more and more transparent, more clear, a more beautiful thing to see. Well what do I need to get rid of to become more pure? Here’s a simple test. Ask yourself about your thoughts, patterns, habits and actions, if Jesus were physically right with you and could see what you’re doing, know what you’re thinking, how would we feel about it? How would you feel about it in his presence?

If it would feel awkward or shameful, you need to change that thing. But why would this be a result of having hope? Because we have hope we know we are included in God’s people. That’s an incredible privilege, an honor, and the last thing we want is to dirty it up. Think about a young woman who is about to get married. She shopped and stressed but finally found the perfect wedding dress that mom and dad bought for her. And it is gorgeous. On her wedding day is she going to care less if before the ceremony they have some burgers and fries and she spills burger grease and ketchup all over her dress? Is she going to say, “Ah, it’s fine”? She would be devastated. We’ve been given a hope of infinitely more worth, than the finest wedding gown. Are we really going to sully that up and not care?

Plus, the hope comes with that advantage of having God with us and sustaining us, which means it is actually possible to make progress in this. It is not a hopeless enterprise. In 1 John 3:2 says the end result of all this is that when we see Jesus we will be like him. Do you really want to be embarrassed by all the ugly stuff you are hiding now? Of course not. Let’s get rid of it.

#### OVERFLOW WITH HOPE

Romans 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” God wants us to overflow with hope.

Remember your hope. Ask God, who is the God of hope, to fill you with hope. Keep focused on the hope that you have eternal life, that God is with you and will strengthen you, that he will use everything that happens in your life to bring good for you, and that we are in his family, never to be abandoned.

View everything that happens in your life through the lens of hope. Not hope that everything will get better, but hope that God loves you, God is present in this thing, God will use it so it has meaning, and God will give you the strength to deal with it.

## BE READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER

I Peter 3:15 says, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” What you need to remember is the world is hopeless. It is excluded and knows it. It is desperate for hope. Seeing someone with hope, someone whose hope overflows, who is able to run and not grow weary, to be positive even in the darkest of days, will cause them to take note. They want that, and when they see it they will want to know how you have it. You have hope. Hope should be the mark of a follower of Jesus, for we are never without him, his love and his strength. As we live in the reality of that it will be apparent to others. So be ready to gently and respectfully tell them where it comes from.

## BE JOYFUL

Romans 12:12 says, “be joyful in hope.” Every moment of every day of your life you have hope. Oh, it is not that everything will go as planned, that you will have whatever you dream of. It is much more important than that. It is hope that you belong to God, that you have eternal life, that God is at work in your life in ways you can’t even see, but he’s always there, that he will never leave your side, even for an instant. That means no matter what may happen you have hope. So you have reason to rejoice.

Recently one day I was wrestling with a problem I have been trying to solve for some time, but have been running into a brick wall no matter what I do. I was discouraged, thinking I am not going to be able to solve it. As I was stewing on that We got a report from Carissa on her latest appointment with the doctor, which included a copy of a sonogram of their baby. It made me think of the near despair we had at the beginning of this year about Michael and Carissa’s attempts to have a child. Not only had they not been successful, it had led to a scary medical episode for Carissa. It literally looked hopeless. And at that lowest point, when all that modern medicine could do had failed, when it seemed it was impossible, God stepped in and answered a prayer we feared would never be answered. That answer was not miraculous, I guess, but it was closely related to a miracle. And as I remembered that I was reminded that with our God there is always hope. And because there is hope, there is joy.