

LOVE THAT BRINGS HOPE

Series: **LOVEFIRST**

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Love, Hope, History, Future

Mark 9:2-9, Genesis 17:1-7, Luke 4:18-19

Melody and I were 19 years old when we got married. We were kids with bright hope for the future. We knew we were young and likely had many years ahead of us, so we didn't make any immediate plans for kids, but we had hope that one day we would add to our family.

It was a few years later when we decided to actually start trying to have kids. And we hoped to soon see a new baby Mosley come into our family. But it didn't happen. In fact, we spent the next 8 years hoping for a baby, being told that we would probably never have a biological child, and ultimately, choosing to pursue adoption, rather than attempting some of the medical treatments that might allow us to conceive.

Through that entire process, we remained hopeful that one day, some way, God would give us a child.

The adoption process was full of all kinds of ups and downs, yet beneath it all was the hope of future with a little one. Then we got a call in November of 2009, just shy of our 12th anniversary, saying there was a baby who had just been born who needed a family. Suddenly, our hope had new life - a real life with a heartbeat who was in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit about an hour away.

A couple of weeks later, we brought that little girl home and named her Lucy. It would be another 18 months before we finalized her adoption, and there were some tense, anxious, and sometimes even angry moments over the course of that 18 months, too. We were dealing with a broken system full of broken people, but most of them were truly trying to do what was in the best interest of the child.

It was a challenging time, and yet, the under-current of hope continued to churn in us. We could envision our future with this little girl, and every hurdle or obstacle was met with prayer and hope and the kind of strength that only comes when we lean on God.

I remember the day we finalized Lucy's adoption as the day a *huge* weight was lifted off my shoulders. I didn't realize it until it happened. I didn't understand just how much I had been weighed down by all the "what if" scenarios. I didn't know what a relief it would be when Lucy was finally, legally, our child. But on that day, after standing in front of the judge and hearing

him make that decree, I knew we were finally free to *truly* look to the future with this little girl, without fear that it would all be snatched away from us.

We were suddenly unshackled from social workers, court systems, home studies, and questions. We could look with hope at our little girl and dream about what her future might hold. We had moved from the bright-eyed hope of marriage to the hope of a child to the hope of what that child could be in the future. From hope to hope to hope.

And that's the way it works in our best of days, isn't it? Hope is the vine we use to swing across the pitfalls of life. And when things are going well, we find a new hope to grab hold of to get us over the next pit. In tougher times, sometimes we lose grip of that hope and find ourselves in a pit of despair - of depression, of hopelessness.

It's only through hope that we continue to be propelled into the future. Hope is the forward motion in life. Without it, we stall. We may even fall backwards.

Today, I want to talk about the source of our hope - not the temporal kind of hope - you know like, "I hope I have enough fuel to make it to the petrol straiten." I'm talking about the big, mega, *meta* kind of hope that sustains us and helps us push forward in life. The kind of hope that can only come from God himself.

We're continuing our series this morning that we've called **LOVEFIRST**, and over the past couple of weeks, we've looked at God's love as a love that restores and a love we can trust. Today, I want to look at Love That Brings Hope.

But first, I want to pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

God has always been a God of hope. Last week I briefly mentioned the meta-narrative of the bible - this overarching, big picture story of the bible - what the bible is really about. In short, God created the world and everything in it to be perfect. We messed it all up, but God set in motion a plan to fix it, to restore us, and to recreate the world the way he made it to be in the first place. This is the meta-narrative of scripture, and hope is the thread that holds it all together.

Without hope, we would all just be defeatists (and some people are). We could look around us and say, "Man, things just keep getting worse and worse. There's no hope for humanity - no hope for this world." But God says, "No, there *is* hope. In fact, there's *certainty*. I'm going to fix this!" But why should we believe him? Why should we put our hope in God?

This is a question that was actually pretty central to the life of Jesus. Jesus, after all, has been called *the hope of the world*. If God is going to fix this, then he's going to fix it through Jesus. So, if we can't hope in Jesus, then we are truly hopeless.

And so, it becomes pretty important for us to figure out what in the world this Jesus guy is all about. And there are some things we can read very plainly in the bible - things like the passage Jesus read at the very beginning of his public ministry - words written by the prophet Isaiah:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18-19*

These are the words Jesus read in the synagogue just after returning from his time of tempting in the wilderness that we talked about last week. This was the very beginning of Jesus' public teaching, so the things he read here must have something to do with what he was all about.

Good news for the poor
Freedom for the prisoners
Sight for the blind
Setting the oppressed free

That's good stuff! That's hope-filled stuff. And we can read about that kind of stuff throughout Jesus' life. It's plain.

But there are other things that maybe aren't as plain - especially if you don't understand the meta-narrative of the bible. Some things we read about Jesus just don't make a whole lot of sense.

Take, for example, the events of Mark, chapter 9. The book of Mark, along with the books of Matthew and Luke, tell of this strange encounter of Jesus, three of his closest followers, and a couple of dead guys. It goes like this (Mark chapter 9, beginning in verse 2)

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became

dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Mark 9:2-9

What a weird thing? Here these guys are. They follow Jesus up this mountain, and all of a sudden, he starts glowing! Then he’s joined by Moses and Elijah - two guys who are like saints and fathers to the Jewish people, but who lived a *long* time ago. And there they are, standing with Jesus and talking with him. What are they talking about?

Well, according to the account in Luke, they were talking about Jesus’ departure - his death to come, maybe even his resurrection and ascension into heaven. And I find this kind of funny because these two guys would have an interesting perspective on departure. Moses, when he died, was buried by God himself, then his body was fought over by spiritual forces. Elijah actually *didn’t* die, but was just swept up into the spiritual realm of heaven.

So, I imagine these three guys standing there on that mountain, all glowing, and kind of shooting the breeze about different ways to depart the earth. Elijah’s like, “Jesus, I think you should go the way I went. It was all, like, *whoosh!*” and Moses is all, “Yeah, but I was *buried* by *God!*” And Jesus is, you know, “Ah, maybe I’ll do both. Be buried, then come back, and then zoom off into heaven.”

Meanwhile, Peter, James, and John are freaking out! And Peter (I love Peter, because the guy just almost can’t help himself), Peter’s like, “Uh...hey...let’s, uh...let’s build some shelters here for you guys. Like, we can put you on display like a little glowing saintly zoo.” I mean, the guy just doesn’t know what to do or say, but for some reason, always feels compelled to do or say *something*. This is a crazy thing that’s happening.

So, what is it all about? What’s up with the glowing dead guys? For that, once again, we have to return to the meta-narrative. What is the bible about? And what is the history of the people leading up to this point?

Well, remember I said that God made everything perfect, we messed it up, so God enacted a plan to fix it. And God enacted this plan starting with a guy named Abram. In the book of

Genesis, the first book in our modern bible, we read about a deal God made with Abram. Genesis chapter 17, starting with verse 1:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

Genesis 17:1-7

God basically says to Abram, "Stick with me, and things will turn out very well for you. You want hope for a bright future? Hitch your wagon to this guy!"

And that's exactly what Abram (now Abraham) does. And God changes his name from Abram, meaning "noble father" to Abraham, meaning, "father of many." And over the years, this hope for the future, first articulated by God to Abram, becomes one of those vines that sustains people through the hard times. God's promise to Abraham - this covenant - would become a signpost that future generations would point back to and say, "We have hope for the future, because God made this promise to father Abraham."

Eventually, Abraham would have two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. This is where Islam splits with Judaism and Christianity. All three point to Abraham as a father of their faith, but Islam then follows more closely with the line of Ishmael, while Judaism and Christianity follow the line of Isaac. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob, who was also known as Israel, had 12 sons - which is where we get the 12 tribes of Israel.

So, God makes this promise to Abram, and two generations later, along comes Israel. And Israel (Jacob) has these twelve sons, including a son named Joseph who gets sold into slavery by his brothers, spends a decade and a half as a slave and then a prisoner, before ultimately becoming a high-ranking official in Egypt.

A famine hits the region, and through a crazy series of events, the entire family of Israel is invited by Joseph to come to Egypt, where they will have food and water for their family and their livestock. Joseph convinces the Pharaoh - the ruler of Egypt - to give them a good piece of land and the family of Israel prospers and grows.

The problem, of course, with a particular tribe of people prospering and growing in a foreign land, is that sometimes that makes people nervous. And eventually, a new Pharaoh comes

to power, Joseph is no longer around, and the new Pharaoh gets nervous that this tribe of Israelites is getting a little too large - a little too powerful. And so he does what any good egomaniacal dictator might do, he subjects them to slavery!

So now, the people of Israel, decedents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - people of God's promise - representatives of God's love bringing hope to a broken world - find themselves enslaved in Egypt...looking for another vine to grab hold of. They're in need of something - someone - in whom to place their hope again.

And along comes a guy named Moses.

Moses was a child who should have never made it - an Israelite baby saved from genocide by a determined mother, discovered in a basket near the edge of the water by Pharaoh's daughter, and raised in the opulence, privilege, and educational environment of Pharaoh's palace.

When Moses grows up, a series of events causes him to struggle with his own identity, and ultimately, God speaks to him about helping to free the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Then, if you've seen the movies, you know that Moses does just that. There are plagues and parting waters and the whole deal, and suddenly, Moses is leading the people of Israel across the desert toward a land of promise. A land of hope.

The people of Israel have found another vine to grab hold of.

Moses would go on to become a pillar of hope for many generations of Israelites. He was the one with whom God visited on a mountain and imparted the law - The 10 Commandments. He was also the one in whom God placed the authority to lead and serve as judge in the nation of Israel during its infancy.

Moses would go on to represent the Jewish hope that if they followed God's law, they would remain in his favor.

Fast forward about 500 years, and along comes a guy named Elijah. By this time, the people of Israel are well-established. They started out as a family, grew during their time in Egypt, became a powerful nation, and settled in the Promised Land - the land of Canaan.

They had become a bonafide kingdom, complete with a human king, just like the other nations around them. They had also suffered the consequences of being ruled and governed by broken human beings, and by the 9th century B.C., when Elijah came along, the nation of Israel had split in two, with the northern kingdom retaining the name Israel, but moving swiftly away from worshiping Yahweh, the God of Israel, with whom Abraham had made his covenant. They instead adopted one of the Canaanite gods, Baal, as their object of worship.

The southern kingdom, called Judah, remained aligned with Yahweh, and though they had their ups and downs, didn't go the way of the northern kingdom.

Elijah, whose name means, "My God is Yahweh," became a bit of a nuisance in the northern kingdom, challenging the king, Ahab, and the prophets of Baal. Then, after providing more than sufficient evidence that Yahweh is the one true God, and after confronting not only Ahab, but also his son Ahaziah in dramatic fashion, Elijah is whisked up into heaven and gone.

But in his time on earth, Elijah had been the bearer of God's word in the midst of Israel's utmost betrayal. He would become sort of a prophet of prophets for the Jewish people. Once again, his words gave them hope that if they served the God of Israel - Yahweh, or Jehovah - that God would bless them.

And so you begin to see this history of hope among the Jewish people. The hope of the promise of Abraham. The hope of the deliverance out of Egypt by Moses. The hope of the promised land. The hope, then, offered by the prophet Elijah.

The Old Testament - the portion of the bible written before Jesus came - ends with these words in the book of Malachi, chapter 4, verses 4-6:

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

Malachi 4:4-6

The final verses of the Old Testament invoke the names of Moses and Elijah. After that, we're told there was a period of 400 years when God didn't speak.

So, during that period of 400 years, the people of Israel clung, with everything they had, onto the hope of Moses and Elijah - of The Law on one hand, and The Prophets on the other.

What did The Law say?

Well, it said much more than "Do this. Don't do that." The Law was actually a roadmap for how to build a nation and how to honor God. It was also a manual for how to make amends to God when you failed to live up to the law.

What did the prophets say?

That was a bit more varied, but the themes typically ran in two streams.

1. Turn back to God.

This was a regularly occurring theme and one of the chief messages of the prophets. They were there to remind the people of Israel to get back to the devotion to God that Abraham had agreed to.

2. There is a Messiah coming

Now, this was a big deal. The people of Israel were used to being saved by someone. Saved by Joseph. Saved by Moses. Several other times, they were rescued by some type of savior. And what the prophets began to say was, "There is one coming who will save you not only from your current set of circumstances, but who will save you eternally - forever and for good - from the consequences of your actions. This "Messiah" or "chosen one" will set things right once and for all.

And so you can see why the people would place their hope in the law and the prophets.

Now flash back to the mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. What happens? Mark 9, verse 7:

*Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. **Listen to HIM!**"*

*Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.
Mark 9:7-8*

God was trying to make this crystal clear. He was saying, "You put your hope in the law and the prophets. You devote your life to the law and the prophets." Here is Jesus, conversing with Moses, who represents the law, and with Elijah, who represents the prophets, and then - *poof!* No more Moses, no more Eliah. God says, "If you want to be devoted to someone, here's my Son. Listen to *him*. If you want to place your hope in someone, here's my Son. Listen to *him*. The law and the prophets were placeholders. They were there to serve a purpose until Jesus came along. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the fulfillment of the words of the prophets. Here's the new vine of hope which you can grab onto!"

Now, let me tell you, that simplifies things a lot for you and me. To know that we can place our hope in Jesus really narrows things down and keeps us from having to jump through a bunch of hoops. Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life." If you're looking for a path to life, Jesus is it.

It's not about following a bunch of rules and laws. It's not even about trying to decipher a bunch of words from some crazy sounding prophets. There's no big secret to uncover. Jesus is the answer. Listen to *him*.

So, what is Jesus saying? What can we cling to in hope for the future? Well, I can't tell you what Jesus might be saying to you right now, but I can tell you the kinds of things he said as recorded in the bible. Things that I think are the keys to hope for the future. He said things like:

1. Love your enemies.
2. Don't worry about tomorrow.
3. Do to others what you would have them do to you.
4. Whoever wants to be a leader must become a servant
5. What do you benefit if you gain the whole world and lose your soul?
6. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.
7. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*"
8. Ask, seek, knock. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

That is a love that brings hope for the future.

We're going to close today by giving you an opportunity to respond to what you've heard and experienced here. And there are 4 ways we would ask you to consider responding:

1. Singing

We're going to sing a few songs that help us reflect on God's love that brings hope.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

Maybe you heard something today that made you reconsider your life, or maybe you have a need - physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise. Maybe you have a friend or family member who could use some help from God. Whatever the case, if you would like someone to pray with you, Melody and I are eager to do that, so please come see us and let us pray with you.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember him. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice

symbolize his blood that was spilled for us. Over here, we have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for anyone who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. This celebration is our gift to you. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order or pattern you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

Closing Prayer