

Chapter 6: Hope That Won't Let Hell Win

By Pastor Jake Wilkinson

For the first time in decades, I don't know if you're aware of this, our life expectancy has been going up and up for decades. For the first time in decades it is actually now trending down. We've taken a slight dip. Now, it is far beyond what it used to be like, for instance, in the 1800s because of childbirth survival rates—it is much better than it used to be, even though there are some times for that.

And there's a book by Caroline Leaf. She writes a book called *Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess*. She talks about this: for the first time in decades the living expectancy of people is being reversed. People are sicker, they're dying younger despite our advances in medicine and technology. What she says is that many researchers believe toxic stress is now responsible, the common denominator for 90% of illness including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Sometimes she goes, "Sometimes it feels like we live in a world of fear." Do you ever feel like that? We turn on the news, World War III is upon us. The stock market's crashing. You know, all this stuff and it's terrible news and we live in this constant state of fear. You are not made to live in a constant state of fear.

Hi. We were made to live in freedom. But she goes on to explain that exposure to pollutions, harmful to our health, new diseases and sicknesses and forms of cancer are actually coming out. And she makes this point: more and more people are actually dying from despair. This is the second leading cause of death between 15 and 24 is suicide. Hopelessness is the common denominator in premature death in the world today. How we deal with hopelessness actually matters.

Now what I wanna talk about is what most people think of when we think of hope and hopefulness is optimism. But hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism in particular is a mindset based on favorable outcomes on the outside. You're constantly looking for the silver lining even in terrible situations. It's like you got in a car crash and everything terrible happened, but you walked out alive. That is a nice silver lining, actually. It was a bad example. Cool.

But it's this thing of, can we still be sad over the outcome? You lost your vehicle, you don't have insurance and all those things. And can we still be sad about that instead of only focusing? Optimistic thinking is only thinking about the positive and actually neglecting the reality that we live in a really harsh world and that bad things happen to good people.

Hope, on the other hand, is a firm and active expectation and it's actually rooted in something that's outside of us. If you're a follower of Jesus, if you're Christian, this should be rooted not just in the promises that God has, but in His character. It should be depicted on who we believe Jesus to be and His direction for our life.

We named this series *On This Rock*. We named this—and by we, I mean me, and somebody put it on the screen for me, and I was really thankful for that. We named this over one particular text that comes out of Matthew chapter 16, where Jesus is talking to Peter and they're having a conversation and Jesus asks a question to Peter. He goes, "Who do you?" They're talking about the Son of Man. They're talking about who Jesus is. He goes, "Who do you say that I am?"

And Peter's response is, "You are the Christ." In other words, you're the Savior. You're the chosen one coming to actually save the world. And He has this response. He goes, "And I tell you, Peter, on this rock, the declaration of what you just said, I will build my church. And the gates of hell will not overcome it."

And this is the, we're looking at the Book of Jude because they're actually asking the same question. In the Book of Jude, these people have come up in the church and they're saying, "Oh, we recognize what grace is and nothing really matters what we do and what we say and Jesus is going to come save us anyway." But Jesus had some other words to say about how we want to live our life.

And the question still remains, "Who do you say that I am?" and if it is the Christ and if we're following His direction, His character and we want that for our lives. He says on that He's gonna build our church on His character and His way of life. We're looking at, again, the viewpoint through Jesus' brother Jude. This is gonna be the last week of this.

Remember last week I said if you wanna know more about our vision statement, come this week? You guys ready for that? Come back next week. We're going to talk about this in our purpose statement. We're actually going to start a lengthy time of talking about it. But it's this: the story of Christianity, the story of following Jesus, is actually about finding new life, about leaving our old life behind and clinging to this new thing that is real life.

Paul talks about throwing off every single thing that's a hindrance, that causes sickness, that causes things in our life that causes some sort of death. And I think this is important to talk about because Jude is going to go here. We'll talk about it a little bit today, but it's this idea that I think I'm going to talk for just about everybody in here. And that's a big statement.

We all have this tendency. We live in America where we get to do what we want when we want for the most part. And we look at this life and we go, "I want that life and that hope and that promise that you provide, Jesus, but I also want it to be just a part of my life. I wanna hang on to all this old stuff that's really causing a lot of sickness and destruction, but I don't like to think of it like that. I really like it and it's promising me something. And I'm gonna hang on to that life while trying to have a life with You."

And that is exactly what Jude is actually trying to push back against in his story. The way of life, our old life, is this thing that actually destroys us, that we know deep down destroys us, that we struggle with. It promises a hope of a better life, but we're actually feeding something that creates hopelessness in our life. And we're watching our world go into despair and hopelessness because they don't have hope in the one thing that can really give them hope.

The story of Jude is really more about what not to do for the big part of it. It's a story about what happens when people quite literally look exactly like the opposite of how we're supposed to live and not follow Jesus, other than just the intellectual acceptance that Jesus will make everything right in the end.

Now, do we believe that? That Jesus will make everything right in the end? I hope so. But it has to be more than just an intellectual acceptance of that. It has to be a reality of right now, here in our lives. We're gonna read verses 20 through 25 of the book of Jude. Again, there's no chapters in it because it's very short. It's a one chapter book, similar—a little bit longer than the book that I wrote, if you remember that.

And it says this, "But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith. Pray in the power of the Holy Spirit and await the mercy of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. And in this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love." He says three different things: build each other up in faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, and then await Jesus' mercy.

And I don't think he's just talking about the end of this world when Jesus comes back. He's talking about await it now, right here in your life, when you're praying in the power of the Holy Spirit. And then he says this, "And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment and show mercy on others, but do with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives."

And this is where we're gonna come to our verse right now. It says, "Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into His glorious presence without a single fault." Is that good news for us this morning? That is the gospel in a nutshell, by the way.

Then he says, "All glory to Him. All glory to Him who alone is God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord and all glory, majesty, power, and authority are set before Him in the present and beyond all time, amen."

Last week we talked about this ability to own ourselves, or the need to own ourselves and to be real with ourselves. And that, this is not removing the responsibility of actually doing that. What it's giving us is the basis to do so from. Does that make sense? It gives us the security that we are secure in Jesus.

And because of that, now look at what this verse says for a minute. Does it say try harder to change yourselves so that you can be acceptable to Jesus? It doesn't say try harder. It doesn't say try harder to just own yourself or be honest with yourself. But those are things where if we are honest with ourselves, we come back to this and say, "God, here's where I'm at." And it says His glorious presence will bring—He will keep you from falling away. And He will bring you with great joy into His glorious presence without a single fault.

Who's doing the work? Jesus is doing this work in your life. We just have to connect ourselves with that. We have to acknowledge Him and pray and await the Holy Spirit. But a note on owning ourselves: there was a quote I just read. It says, "Spiritual power can flow in almost any circumstance, but it cannot flow when people hide and pretend to be what they are not."

Facing ourselves is a really scary thing. And yet what he says is when you do that, you bring that to the foot of the cross and you bring that to Me and we work on this together, "I'm gonna work in you in ways that you could never imagine. We're gonna heal in ways that we could never see otherwise." Because God's the one that does the rescuing. That's kind of the point of Him being a Savior. It's not just in the end, it's right now in your life. He can save you from your very circumstances.

But even then our hope is not just dependent on our circumstances changing. Popular author Jenny Allen talks about three unseen core lies that people believe. She says all of us believe one of these things at some point in our lives: that you're hopeless, you're worthless, and you're unlovable. Every single human being, she says, at some point wrestles with these things; we just mask it with different things.

And she talks about her need to have hope and to feel seen and to be loved. She remembers that around the age of 12 she had this experience with her dad. She had a really good, loving dad, but there was some experience that put such a pressure on her at a young age to be successful and to be able to fulfill what he wanted her to be, that it created this wound in her life. It created this thing, this unattainable goal that she continued to try to search for her entire life.

Now goals are good, but if we go after our goals because our motive is a need for achievement to feel love and to feel hope in life, I will tell you this—she will tell you this—you will never get that. If the whole reason we do things, our inner motive, is actually to get acceptance from other people or acceptance from God or our parents, your goalpost will be always continued to move forward. It will be unreachable.

There's people that would look at her life—she's a successful author, she loves Jesus, she has a good marriage. And yet she still, in the end after all this stuff, still felt hopeless. Why? And then the really scary thing

she said was that her grown adult daughter started saying the exact same things. And she goes, "Why in the world would my grown daughter say those things when I have never put that type of pressure, never did it?"

And she boils it down to this: "My daughter heard me saying this about myself." She adopts the lie that her very parent gave her. Wonderful parent, amazing parent that cared for her, and yet it's there. And she goes, "I feel broken, worthless, defective, and hopeless." And Jenny says at this moment, she was enraged. How could my daughter feel like this? She's a beautiful woman, has a successful marriage, kids, she's a successful photographer. And yet she feels like this.

She wanted to take her daughter by the shoulder and say, "You are amazing." But then she realized that that was my lie and it was contagious. And she goes, "That's how generational sin works." It's not always just this idea that it's something that the parent did to them. It can be the parent's very identity that is transferred to the child.

I believe that that happens in our churches and in our communities too. As we see our own identity—and I'm preaching to myself here—as I look at my own wounds and my own feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, that's terrifying to me because I realize what I'm doing right now. You're laughing. Someone's laughing. That helps. Thank you.

But it's this idea that if we live in a hopeless world and we're watching hopeless things on TV and we watch the hopeless news, let's be real, and that's what we absorb all the time, of course we're gonna feel hopeless. Of course we're gonna have this unswaying sense of dread. But Jude, he's giving us an answer here by this. He's saying getting more hope isn't about our external circumstances changing. And it's not about trying harder.

If hopelessness and hope are both contagious, it really boils down to proximity with hope itself. Making some sort of connection with things of hope—and the stories that are told us and the lies that are told us about being hopeless need to end. And that starts with the very one that can connect us with hope.

There's a quote by Dallas Willard. He says, "The greatest issue facing the world today is whether those who identify as Christians will become disciples, students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ." He doesn't say the greatest issue is out there. We think when we turn on the TV the issues are all out there—World War III, the stock market. He goes, "No, the greatest issue in the world is right here in our church. Are we actually going to be apprentices and disciples of Jesus instead of just intellectually learning about Him?"

Do we take the time to sit at the feet of the very one that can give us hope, and is that hope spread from us to the outside world? We have Bible studies, we read self-help books and seminars. But we have to spend more significant time sitting in the presence of the Spirit if we wish to feel hopeful and keep the darkness at bay. Sitting and receiving hope from the one who sees the end of all things and provides the deepest yearnings of our heart.

And to quote Rihanna, we need to find love in a hopeless place. We need more than optimistic thinking and just thinking positively about every bad thing that happens. We need true, genuine hope that things in the end will work out, and that hope right now that even if things fall apart, we are still secure in the love and the grace of our Savior Jesus Christ and our community. And it is over that when we find that, that the gates of hell will not even be able to overcome the church.

I think sometimes we think that God's optimistic, looking for the positive in everything, but I don't think that's how Jesus is either. We see this primarily if you look at Him on the way to the tomb of Lazarus. He's there walking and He's not skipping and excited about what He's headed into. He knows what's gonna happen, He's gonna raise this person from the dead. And yet He sits there and He weeps with people.

Because He's not optimistic in this. He sees what sin and suffering and death have done. He doesn't try to create a silver lining. He mourns with people because of what it's done to humans. And yet He doesn't lose hope. That's the kind of hope that we need. We can still grieve—as Paul calls it, we grieve but not as the world grieves because they don't have hope. We have hope. And I do believe that that is a contagious hope.

I want us to ask ourselves seriously: "Am I full of hope? Am I hopeful?" And is that true just in my words, or is it true in the way that I live my life out? And if the answer is one that we don't really like, I think the answer is to sit with the one that's gonna give us hope. Not simply reminding ourselves of true things, that is important, but having the one that can cure our woundedness.

There is a 1950s experiment. I forget the name of the scientist. He would take a rat, and they had this bucket of water that the rat could not get out of, and they would drop the rat in it until he drowned, and they would time it. And the rats lived—I know, happy Sabbath, everybody—between 10 and 15 minutes before they drowned.

What they started doing was they said, "We're going to shift this experiment just a little bit." So right before they started to drown, they started to pluck them out of the water and they would sit them right next to this bucket and let them catch their breath. Right after that, they would take them and pluck them back in the water.

How long do you think the rat survived the second time in the water? Keep in mind, the first time was 10 to 15 minutes. This is a very morbid lesson, isn't it? If we come back to the book *Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess*, she explains that we as a society have gotten so good at treating our symptoms, but we really need sustainable changes of getting our mind in order. We need hope. It's going to help people survive far more.

She says stop waiting for the job promotion or the weight loss program. Take back control of our thoughts. We can manage our own mind, and I do believe this is a biblical concept because Paul talks about this. He says, "Take every thought that comes into your mind, take it captive and make it a servant to Jesus." We are allowed to manage our own mind and that builds a healthy and hopeful neural network.

She gives us five points: to gather our thoughts, read, listen, watch what we're thinking and how we're feeling; then reflect on them; then we write them down; then we recheck them; then we do something called active reach or we apply. This is how we create new neural networks. This is when we apply the hope of Jesus Christ into this moment.

Now, what would that feel like to you? If we came at it from this perspective of hopeful expectancy, I believe we would watch far more people be free to be themselves. That fear and anxiety wouldn't overwhelm us as much. If we were hopeful and lived in hopeful expectancy, it would change our church and it would change our community.

You ready for the survey results? Not very many of you fell for the five minutes. That's the logical guess—they're already tired and worn out. Most of you guessed between one and two and a half hours. You know what the right answer is? It's 60 hours. 3600 minutes.

Here's the thing about this. What they boiled down to was that the rat would give up and become hopeless within 10 to 15 minutes because it didn't see a way out. The rat would continue swimming for 60 hours because it expected a hand to come down and pluck it out of the water. Do you see what hope does? It completely changes our perspective.

And if you think that a rat can swim for 60 hours because a human hand is going to pluck them out of the water, how much more would hope change your life—of a living God who could pluck you out of the situation that you were in?

There's a reason why we call Jesus the Savior. I think the promise becomes all the more real when we experience His salvation right now in our lives. When we experience His hand, maybe even in a little way, saving us from certain situations. I think we have far more power than a rat to swim 60 hours. Whatever fear we have, whatever anxiety is so tight around our chest that we can't breathe, when we put our hopes in Jesus and His character to save us, that's where the hope that this world cannot give you and cannot take away will come from.

And that's why when Jesus is talking to Peter, He goes, "Who am I to you?" And Peter goes, "You are the Christ." That means You are the anointed one coming to save us from the world. He goes, "And on that hope, I'm going to build My church, and not even the gates of hell can stand against it." Nothing will be able to stand against the hope that we have in Jesus. He looks at the ordinary and the pathetic, like sometimes you and I, and He goes, "When you trust Me and believe in Me and put your hope in a different type of kingdom, you will find life."

This is how we start to look different and not respond like the rest of the world. Tim Keller shares a story about a woman who had this hope. Someone severely wronged her in her life. He goes, "Don't you feel any sort of motivation to get back at them and for justice to be done?" And she simply says, "If they have wronged things, God will be the judge in the end. I am not their judge."

He said at this moment he had this vision of what happens in our lives when we feel overwhelmed by evil. It's like we have our castle and we're being bombarded by the enemy and we go up to the top of the keep as our last stand from all the evil that's overcoming us. And we look out over this field of destruction and everything that's happened. And we look in the distance and we see an army coming.

He said that is the army of your salvation, of your rescue actually coming to destroy evil and it will come forever. It will abolish evil forever. And this is the story of Jude: when we put our hope in that, when we put our hope that Jesus can save us now and He will make everything right in the end, we will live our lives differently. We will look differently and that hope will be contagious to our communities and to each other. We wait in hopeful expectation of our Savior Himself.

Let's have a word of prayer. Jesus, please help us. When we are filled with hopelessness, Lord—that is many of us a lot of times when we look at things that are hopeless, at things that we struggle with, of getting over addictions and our shortcomings and our failures. When we put hope in this world, Lord, heal us from those lies, save us from them. Give us true hope and give us a way that we can rely on You, that we can trust You. You will make things right in the end and we can act differently today because we trust that hope. We love You, Jesus. Thank You. Amen.