

Text: Phil. 3:17-21

Theme: Finding Hope in the Midst of Doomsday

February 21, 2016

As we look at our world, listen to the news, and listen to our readings for today, one could easily and rightfully conclude that it's all discouraging, depressing, that doomsday is right here, right now. Surrounded by an ample supply of doomsday activity, Paul offers us hope, hope that sustains us until we finally have opportunity to leave this doomsday world behind. Today, we focus on finding hope in the midst of doomsday.

I. Surrounding by an abundance of doomsday activity, our God continues to offer us an abundance of hope. A. To recognize our hope, we first take a brief journey through doomsday. 1. As we journey, we see those who live as enemies of the cross. They have no use for God, no interest in God, and wish the rest of us would stop talking about God because, in their minds, God is dead and if God isn't dead, He surely is useless. In our humblest moments, we must acknowledge that sometimes we aren't best friends of the One who hung Himself on that cross. Sometimes, we are on the fringe and the message of hope doesn't register when we need it most.

2. We also witness an incessant focus on things. Paul says, "Their minds are set on earthly things." In other words, stuff is all that matters. More stuff, better stuff, compete with the neighbors stuff. Life, for them, is all about more stuff which is ultimately more useless fluff. In our spiritual moments, we are quick to announce to ourselves that we're not like them. But we know better. Within this materialistic world, we sometimes end up on a detour, on a path that says, "I need more because he has more!" We don't want to admit those moments exist, but our hearts won't allow us to deny the truth - all the stuff around us does distract us from time to time.

3. On our journey, we encounter those who stand for nothing. Paul instructs us to stand firm, but it's easier said than done. In our eagerness to overlook our actions, we are quick to point out those who fall for anything. By doing so, we feel better, less guilty, less humbled. But try as we may, there are those times when we fail to stand, when we crumble, when we go with the flow because, in that moment unlike other moments, we don't want to stand out, but to blend in. It's not our lack of knowledge, but our lack of fortitude, our lack of sticktoitiveness that leads us to crumble in some moments only to be frustrated later because we didn't stand for the truth.

B. Plagued by such discouraging, doomsday activities, how do we find hope? 1. We find hope by remembering that our citizenship is in heaven. Maybe our physical address at the moment is Medford or Chelsea, or Westboro, but our eternal address, the address that postman and FedEx never delivers to is in heaven. Our address here is only temporary. We're only living among doomsday for a little while, and then, by the grace of God, we're leaving. We're tossing aside this gloomy, doomy world and saying, "Ah. I've finally arrived. Thank You, Lord, for returning for me!" Our future eternal address, our place on heaven's boulevard, that's where we find our lasting hope.

2. We find hope by imitating Christ. Paul writes, "Join in imitating me," which, at first glance, sounds a bit arrogant. But what Paul is saying is, "Imitate me as I seek to imitate Christ, the ultimate example, but if you are struggling to imitate One

whom you cannot see, then imitate one who follows Christ.” By following the great example of Jesus who humbled Himself to the point of the cross for us, we find the hope that gets us out of bed each morning saying, “Today, I’m going to do something to make this world a better place, something to honor God. In doing so, I will imitate Him and be surrounded by that peace and hope that surpasses all human understanding.”

3. We find hope by fixing our eyes on Jesus. How important is the ability to focus? If you’re an avid rifle or crossbow marksman, how critical is it that you have the ability to focus, to remain unmoved when the target is in sight? This world around us is a mess; it’s hopeless, depressing, discouraging, heart-breaking, and more. In the midst of our doomsday, Jesus says, “Focus. Set your sights on that goal line; focus on running; focus on arriving; focus on obtaining the crown. Focus, focus, focus!” As we fix our eyes on the coveted goal line, as we tell ourselves, “That’s what matters most to me today,” our hope meter increases and our despair meter decreases.

4. We find hope by eagerly waiting for Christ’s return. What’s the absolute best thing that could happen in the next week? There’s only one perfect answer - that Christ would return and call this doomsday to an end. Every morning, our Father wants us to say with conviction, “Maybe today. Maybe Christ will return today.” And every evening, He likewise wants us to say, “Maybe tonight, Lord. Maybe tonight while I sleep.” We don’t want to stay in this doomsday place forever. We want to leave, to focus on our mission intently every day as we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, come. Open the heavens and return for I am ready and waiting!”

5. We find hope by standing firm. When you think of standing firm, do you picture a huge barge firmly anchored or a row boat on the Mississippi? We can imagine it, but to find hope we need to take the next step. We need to stand firm, be immovable, refuse to budge, and say as Luther did so many years ago, “Here I stand. I can do no other so help me God!” When we are standing firm, when we’re securely on the rock of Christ, we are people of hope, people who know that this too shall pass, people who are prepared to endure all the doomsday activity because we know our lives are secure, that we are held in the palm of the Creator of the universe.

6. We find hope by awaiting our glorious transformation. Paul says of Christ, “Who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body.” Can we even begin to wrap our brain around that concept? How can this corrupted shell be transformed into something so amazing? I don’t know how, but I believe it’s going to happen and I believe you believe the same. This body may not function as we would prefer; we may wish it would function far better and with far less pain and affects of aging. But while we wait, we prepare for, we anticipate that day when God will work one of His greatest miracles, the miracle of transformation, the miracle that creates a living hope.

7. The world, the news, sometimes even portions of God’s Word can spark thoughts that we’re living amid doomsday. Yet, the best news is that even though we are surrounded by doomsday, we can always be people of great hope. Amen.