

O. Intro:

A small child was once heard murmuring to himself on Easter morning a poem he had composed which began "Chocolate eggs and Jesus risen".

Okay, now some would say...

1. This is terrible, the child is confused
2. CS Lewis, said it was wonderful

*He said the day will come when the child can no longer effortlessly and spontaneously enjoy that unity of the spiritual and the festive aspects of Easter.

*At that point he will go one of two directions:

1. He will put the eggs first and they will soon become nothing except mere chocolate.
-They will take on an independent and a withering life of their own...detached from the reality of God.
2. He will put the spiritual (reality of the resurrection) first and he will still be able to taste something of Easter in the chocolate...all things have higher meaning when set on eternal truth.

*When human life is detached from hope in God then human life begins to wither away.

*By human life I mean all of it...jobs, homes, families, hobbies, health, chocolate eggs...all of it.

*Human life is detached from hope in God when anything other than God becomes our prime hope.

*But when our hopes are grounded in God...then the remainder of life...the things we enjoy but do not depend on as our ultimate hope...take on fuller joy and fulfillment in themselves

***Biblical Hope has been defined as "a joyous anticipation of good."**

*The philosopher Nietzsche said that "hope is the worst of evils because it prolongs human suffering."

*He said this even as he hoped to find a coherent philosophy to make sense of his life and the world around him.

*An army Chaplain who wrote of his experience in a Japanese prison camp said that often younger, healthier men died sooner because they were prone to abandon hope sooner...hopelessness is deadly.

*There is language like..."Misplaced hope" or "False hope".

*It is a hope that is in the wrong thing or person and therefore an illusion...not founded on reality or substance.

*Often people have not considered where they have placed their hope or what exactly their hope consists of.

*Maybe they are "hoping" for "something" good to happen "someday."

*Something...means their hope is often undefined.

*Someday...normally means they hope there will be a serendipitous event...not the result of their careful choices....but just "I hope what I hope will happen."

*Some are more defined in what they hope for, yet they don't really know what their hope is based on:
"I hope to be married."

*"what do you hope marriage will bring to your life?"

-"Sex, partnership, stability, friendship..."

*"Okay and what do you hope those things will bring to your life?"

*"I hope for Job"

-"What do you hope to find in that job?"

-"Satisfaction, comfort, buying power, prestige..."

-"And what do you hope to find in those things?"

*These are not bad hopes...they just cannot serve as a foundation for a life.

*But often people attempt use these and other secondary hopes as foundational ones.

***The ground of all hope is in God.**

*When we ground our hopes in God...we get to enjoy other lesser hopes because we do not "need" them for our lives to matter or be whole.

*Three times the Psalmist said the exact same thing.. **"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God!"** Psa. 42:11

*This is wonderful stuff...he is preaching to himself...telling himself where to put his hope.

*Some would say..."Oh, no that's not good, if you have to tell it to yourself it must not be real or substantial."

*Well, that's not so...we have to tell ourselves the truth all the time or we will soon believe what's not true.

"You need to believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts" Willard

*In our culture doubting is seen as being more intelligent than believing.

*Which of course means that people are "believing their doubts"

*Which means they are not doubting anymore but they are believing.

*They have become professional skeptics...they believe firmly in their own skepticism.

*We must often choose to believe what we really believe and doubt what we really doubt.

*I mean the really important stuff like...

-"Love is best and it means I must put her first right now...I'm doubting whether it will be good, don't feel it...but I must doubt my doubts and do it anyway."

-"Soul, you know better than that...do not fall into despair...now put your hope back in God where it belongs."

*All hope is based on "thinking" but not all hope is based on good thinking and therefore not all hope is well placed.

*"No Terry, my hope is based on faith not thinking."

*Okay, that's good but I do hope your faith is based on good thinking.

*John Stott in his book "Your mind Matters" wrote that:

"Faith and thought belong together, and believing is impossible without thinking. Let's look at an example of this in Matt 6:30, **"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you-you of little faith? Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, aren't you more valuable than a sparrow?"**

*Stott says that Jesus is asking us to think logically...

"God cares about grass, doesn't it follow that he cares about you?"

"God cares about sparrows (2 for a penny), think about it, don't you think you are worth as much as two birds."

*"Humm, well, when you put it that way, yes, I would think I'm worth more than a couple of sparrows..."

*Jesus said..."Well, then stop worrying!"

*The Great Commandment is to love God with all our "Hearts, soul, strength...mind"

*My purpose so far is to get us here: **Biblical hope is a joyous anticipation of good and**

*This hope is not based merely on "feeling" and certainly not on "circumstances"

*It is based solidly on facts...specifically...the fact of the reality of God and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

*And those facts must be thought about, often...carefully and consistently considered.

*Instead of freaking out when we doubt our hope...we should carefully consider our doubts and our hopes.

"Should I doubt my doubts right now, or do I have any good reason to doubt my hopes."

*Emotion alone does not have that kind self-reflective capacity...emotion has its place...it is the friend of thought.

*And thought is the friend of emotion...they are great partners in our lives.

*But our hope is not a mere emotion...it has emotional energy and impact in our lives...but it is fact based.

*I don't generally like poetry...but I've been trying to choke a few down every now and then.

*This week I read a poem written by Francis Thompson, an English poet who suffered a great deal in his life.

*When I first read this poem my reaction was ..."What in the world is he talking about?"

*Then I read it out loud several times.

*I used my mind to make sense of the older words he used and consider what they mean today.

*Then I thought about his life, how he suffered.

*Then I read it again, out loud...and I was suddenly overcome with emotion as I sat in my basement chair...the words came alive to me...his life came alive to me...his pain and God's pursuit of him was real.

*Thinking and feeling are allies in our lives...I encourage you to apply yourself...all you to what God wants to say to us.

*We are going to look at two great passages...doing our best to engage them with our minds and emotion.

*But we hope for as we look to God and his word is a result in our lives that exceeds the effort we ourselves can give.

*Of course we must give full effort but that will not be enough.

*Coach Marshall appropriately told his basketball team, "Your best will be enough."

*God never tells us that...He says, "You must give your best, but it will never be enough...but I will be."

*So we can and must give full effort without putting our hopes in our efforts.

*Let's Stop...ask for the Holy Spirit to help: **"Lord we offer you our best...heart, mind, will, effort, attention...we understand all that is not enough..."**

***SPECIAL SONG**

1Pet. 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

*There is the ground for our hope...the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...he is God, the gospel is true.

*Our hope is alive...It is historically factual...but it is not based on mere historical facts.

*One non-believing philosopher who loved to debate Christians on college campuses said "it would be very strange, but if I stood there and watched Jesus Christ coming out of the tomb, coming back to life and walking around, it wouldn't imply that a God existed."

*So for this man...In a universe that is as strange as ours...string theory, black holes, dark matter, multi-dimensions...the idea of someone returning from the dead is just one more strange thing that could have happened.

*But it would not lead to worship, or commitment, or personal transformation...it would be mere information, strange information...but simply information.

*A resurrection would not compel faith in him.

*So if a special person named Jesus rose from the dead 2k years ago...this man would not have saving faith...and he would not believe in God.

*The fact of the resurrection event is important...it must have actually happened in space and time...a myth, or legend or a happy thought will not save us.

*But this is more than a historical event...it is God, the maker of heaven and earth, ultimate reality...dying on a cross to make a way for us to experience an entirely new kind of life now.

*Let's look at a very practical application of the Easter Hope.

1Pet. 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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

1. In your hearts set apart Christ Jesus as Lord.

*In the Bible the heart is the real you, the thinking, choosing part of you..

*Set apart Christ Jesus as Lord (boss, undisputed master)

*This is an undivided heart...not looking to hedge our bets..."I'll put some of my hope in Jesus, but some in other things just in case."

*To set him apart as Lord means no idols, no other masters, no attempt to ground our hopes in anything other than him.

2. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

*When Jesus is the undisputed master of our lives...we live with a different kind of hope than others do.

*This is real, substantial...so much so that others want to know "what is it and how do you have it?"

*"But Terry, no one is asking me to give the reason for the hope that I have."

*Let's think about this together...let's ponder why this might be true for us.

*This passage was written to a group of Christians who were suffering for their faith.

*In their suffering they continued to exhibit hope...this was puzzling to those who were watching their lives.

*You see the prime apologetic for their faith was not their ability to give arguments for God's existence...

-Their very lives, their persistent hope was what caused others to ponder the source of their hope.

*If our lives look the same or similar to those who are not finding their hopes in God...then why would they ask for the reason for our hope?

*When we make Jesus Lord, when we say "yes" to him and consistently and quickly repent when we say "no" to him.

*Our lives will be different...our hope will be different.

*Why would this not be true?...how could it not be true?

*The gospel is real and true...so what Jesus said about what it would mean for a life is true...

*We are to look like people who are being supplied with hope from a source outside the realm of what people normally experience.

*Something that is important to remember about spiritual progress:

*Any change(growth) in our lives leads to a new awareness of the need for change, this can bring a sense of not having changed at all.

*Often we will look back at our last year self and shudder, your next year self will probably do the same...so growth brings new awareness of need for growth.

*It is better to focus on God's grace and faithfulness than on my perpetual need for ongoing change.

*Focus on saying "Yes" to Jesus...setting him apart in your heart as Lord.

*Focus on finding your hope in him...not on being different enough for people to notice.

*As God gives opportunity to announce the reason for our hope...we must do this in a way that actually helps people.

3. But do this (give an answer for the hope) with gentleness and respect.

*"Why do you have that hope, why do you think that way, live that way?"

*"I have been blessed because of the grace of God in our lives, he touched my heart through the word of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit and I believed."

*So the goal must never be to look, act, speak...like I am right..I am smart...and you are wrong.

*We are to look, act, speak like God is true and he has showered mercy on us and put this hope in us.

*The goal is not to "win" or look smart...but rather to live our lives in line with the reality of God.

*What is important to remember is that these people Peter was addressing were being asked for the reason for their hope in the midst of difficult circumstances...that is what was puzzling to people watching them.

*"Hey, I can see what is happening to you and should not have hope right now...what gives...where are you getting that?"

*We can say...

*"The gospel is true, by God's mercy I am living in line with what creation, reality, human life, human history is all about."

*Our hope is not merely in having our facts straight so we can pass some final life exit exam.

*Our hope is not merely in a credit arrangement where when we die all our debts will be written off.

*Our hope is a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

*This hope empowers a life that is substantially different now.

Conclusion:

One of my favorite authors wrote not long before he went to heaven:

"The great problem today is not the doubt outside the church but the doubt that is inside."

*Maybe you don't doubt God exists...

-But you doubt prayer is worth doing because God is going to do what he wants anyway, so why would you pray?

-Perhaps you don't believe substantial change is possible, so why try to engage the disciplines and live in the power of the Holy Spirit?

-Maybe you don't believe a personal relationship with God is a practical reality...that he doesn't speak to people anymore and give real life direction...so you live with the facts of God but not a warm relationship with God.

*It is really important to be honest with where you are...in order to progress.

*Let's look at a famous NT unabashed doubter.

John 20:24 Now Thomas one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

*Jesus let Thomas spend a week with his question...you have to wonder what he thought.

-Did he doubt the other disciples?

-Did he doubt his own doubts?

-Probably both

*Jesus may let you sit in your doubts for some time as well...if he does, it will be because he has good reason to...not because he is punishing you for your doubts.

John 20:26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” **27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

*This doesn't appear to be a rebuke, he invited Thomas to touch his resurrected wounds...then he simply said..."**From now on doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs.**"

John 20:28 Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

*Thomas made his confession of faith

*"Yeah Terry, so would I if that happened to me."

*What a minute, Jesus has an answer for that.

John 20:29 Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

***Blessed="happy, fulfilled, complete" are those who have not seen what Thomas has seen and yet have real belief.**

*Part of what Jesus is saying is that it is every bit as possible to have the kind of faith Thomas did without seeing Jesus like Thomas did.

*Jesus is happy to make himself known to us...to you...in ways that are helpful for you and for me.

But don't pretend:

*Maybe you have been directly or indirectly told to deny, ignore, conceal or fear your doubts...this is really unhelpful...and unbiblical.

*In our Youth group...our teens are not disparaged from sharing their doubts...they are helped, taught, encouraged.

*This is not the same as what some groups do in fostering doubts, raising controversial issues merely to look intelligent.

*We neither want to foster doubt or deny it when it is there.

*We want to encourage authenticity and we believe the gospel is true.

*Therefore we don't want our kids to fake it and we are not afraid of questions...because God has made us sure of the answer.

*Richard Robinson a leading atheist philosopher of the latter part of the 20th century, now deceased.

"Christian faith is not merely believing that there is a God. It is believing that there is a God no matter what the evidence may be. "Have faith" in the Christian sense means, "make yourself believe that there is a God without regard to evidence."

*This is a generally accepted view of faith, and this view, when believed, is what undermines faith more than any supposed evidence against it.

*It is simply not true..."faith" never means making yourself believe with no regard to the evidence.

*This narrative makes Christians insecure...it seems as if our Hope is based on unreality.

*No, it is not...it is based on the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus.

*All the real evidence is favorable to our faith.

*All people live by faith...even Richard Robinson lived by faith, while he was alive.

*I do not say this as a Joke, but in all seriousness...he is no longer an atheist, only the living can be atheists...the dead all know better.

*Learn to doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs...but not by merely denying you have doubt or pretending you have faith.

*Do this by experiencing God in your life.

*The faith we possess in the Gospel is real, it is true.

All people live by faith.

Not all faith is grounded in fact.

Faith in the resurrection is grounded in a fact.

The resurrection is a fact that leads to a Living Faith.

Your faith is factually true, but it must be relationally alive.

SMALL GROUP NOTES

Easter 2015

1. **Define "hope."** How is it difference from "faith"? How are they similar? How are they interrelated?
2. **How is "hope" commonly used or thought of in our society.** Describe some ways in which people use the word or think of the concept.
3. **How can hopelessness be dangerous or even deadly?** Why is this true for humans?
4. **What does it mean to say "The ground of all hope is God"?**
5. **Read: Matt. 6:25** “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.
6. **Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote...**"The trouble with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else (circumstances for instance), and, as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry...That is not thought; that is the absence of thought, a failure to think."
 - *How was Jesus encouraging our faith by encouraging good thinking in the passage above?
 - *How is a failure of faith really just a failure to think and what are some implications for that statement in our lives?
7. **Read: 1Pet. 1:3** **Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**
 - *Why do you think Peter wrote of a "living hope"?
 - *How has the resurrection of the dead brought us into this "living hope"?
8. **Read: 1Pet. 3:15** **But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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 does it mean, practically to "set apart Christ as Lord in your heart"?
 - *How would we live "prepared to give an answer" for the hope we have?

*Has anyone asked you "Why you have hope" or something similar?

*What are some possible reasons we are not asked this question more often?

9. Why would Peter specify we should answer people's questions about our faith with "gentleness and respect"?

10. How have you seen this done otherwise, or perhaps done otherwise yourself?

11. What impact does an other than "gentle and respectful" answer have on people?

12. Do you doubt? What do you doubt? Why do you doubt? How do you feel about your doubt and what do you do about it?



hope

Hope:

"A joyous anticipation of good"

The ground of all hope is God

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God!"

Psa. 42:11

"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, aren't you more valuable than a sparrow?"



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"Believe in God, believe also in me."

John 14:1

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