

## THE GOSPEL IN STEP 2

This is our second teaching in our twelve-part series called *The Gospel in the Twelve Steps*. We talked last time about how victory in Christ starts with surrender to Christ – we admit defeat, we lay down our arms, leave the enemy camp, and we talked about how this is a gospel moment. The good news of Jesus Christ in this moment is that we are simply agreeing with God that our lives are indeed out of control (unmanageable), and when we do this, we are confessing our need for the one who is all powerful and who, has already won the war, even as we continue to fight our battle with sin. It's a Gospel moment because it's what God has been waiting to hear for a long time.

But often there is a sense of despair, of defeat, of hopelessness when we show up for the first time in recovery, and are confronted with our utter powerlessness. We are brought to a sense of hopelessness in step 1, but in step 2 we move from being **hopeless to being hopeful**. I believe the Gospel in step 2 is about hope (I thought this well before hearing Greg's excellent teaching on HOPE), so here's my Gospel proposition for step 2: **Healing (from Christ) starts with hope (in Christ)**.

Step 2: We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. "We came to believe" – that's hope. "That a power greater than ourselves" – that's Jesus Christ. "Could restore - that's healing. "To sanity" – to a healthy, sound way of thinking and living. **Healing (from Christ) starts with hope (in Christ)**.

We're going to talk about where, or who our hope is in, how hope is created in us, and how healing starts with hope, but before we do that, I want to

spend some time listening to how the Bible talks about hope – the Bible has a lot to say about hope, and so it makes sense to understand what it says, so that it will indeed lead to our healing.

Here’s a good definition from Eerdmans Bible Dictionary: “Confident expectation, ranging in degree from an ordinary desire felt with eager anticipation to a defining characteristic of those who seek God and experience his grace.”<sup>1</sup> There’s always a future view with hope, even in regard to simple things (“I hope it doesn’t snow tomorrow), but for the Christian, hope is a defining characteristic of who we are – we want to experience God’s presence, his saving activity in our lives, and so we wait for him with hope.

Many, many verses in the Bible, but here are a few:

<sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my salvation<sup>6</sup> and my God.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
<sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is plentiful redemption.

<sup>8</sup> And he will redeem Israel  
from all his iniquities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myers, A. C. (1987). *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (500). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Ps 42:5–6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

In the Bible, faith, hope and love are intricately connected (famously so in 1 Cor 13:13). Faith begins with hope. Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is being sure of what you hope for, and certain of what you cannot see.” They work together, but it begins with hope – we wait for a future encounter with God, or answer to prayer, and as our faith grows, we become more and more certain of what we hope for. And the love of God, the love for God and his people, the sacrificial love he shows to us and expects from us, the “agape” love, is not really possible without hope that God will enable us to love as he intends. That’s why it’s a defining characteristic of the Christian – all that we do, or desire to do as believers starts with our hope in God.

And, notice with me how often the Bible speaks of hope and power together:

<sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Ps 130:5–8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Eph 1:15–21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. <sup>5</sup>

Now, back to where we are in step 2, which is still a place of insanity, but where we begin to have hope that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Listen to this: “Hope is most truly itself when it occurs in the context of darkness, suffering or persecution.” We don’t think much about hope when our present circumstances are great – we have no need of a future expectation. But when we are in darkness and suffering, that is when hope becomes most evident. It is a great gift from God to keep us from despair – despair will paralyze us, but hope will free us to take the next right step in our recovery (**Children of Men example**).

Hope and power in the context of suffering – that’s what God reveals to us in this passage from the prophet Zechariah:

- <sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
 Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
 Behold, your king is coming to you;  
 righteous and having salvation is he,  
 humble and mounted on a donkey,  
 on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
 and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
 and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
 and he shall speak peace to the nations;  
 his rule shall be from sea to sea,  
 and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- <sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,  
 I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- <sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;  
 today I declare that I will restore to you double.
- <sup>13</sup> For I have bent Judah as my bow;  
 I have made Ephraim its arrow.  
 I will stir up your sons, O Zion,  
 against your sons, O Greece,

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Ro 15:13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

and wield you like a warrior's sword.<sup>6</sup>

As we look at the Gospel in the twelve steps, it is helpful to compare our behavior with God's people in the Old Testament. God delivers his people from slavery in Egypt with mighty acts of power, and forty days later they are complaining about the food (entitlement). Moses goes up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments; they get scared, and make a golden calf to worship (idolatry). God shows them the Promised Land, and they insult God with a tremendous lack of faith (the people there are too big).

God never stops being faithful – he keeps his end of the covenant relationship, even when his people fail to keep their end. At this point in the OT story, God has brought a remnant of his people back from exile, and they have the opportunity to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed – destroyed by enemies, but also destroyed by their lack of trust in God, and a misplaced sense of trust in their own political power.

Can you connect with these people? They are stubborn, easily misled, interested in satisfying their own desires instead of pleasing God. They've been brought low by their lack of obedience, cast off into exile, but now have a chance to rebuild their lives. And they're afraid, unable to start the rebuilding project because of their fear. And so Zechariah speaks to them of their future.

He says, "Rejoice!" because a king is coming – not just any king, but one who will ride into a rebuilt Jerusalem on a donkey – he will simply speak about peace to the nations and it will be so; he will free prisoners from their captivity at

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<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Zec 9:9–13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

the bottom of waterless wells; he will lead his people in victory against the great foes like Greece; and he will restore to his people double what they had.

He will do this, not with political power or mighty armies, but he will do this with love. Yes, blood will be spilled to bring all this about, but it will be the king's own blood, shed for us on the Cross.

Rejoice! Rejoice in spite of your circumstances. Rejoice because God is still faithful to you after years of ignoring or avoiding or rebelling. Rejoice even when you don't feel like it, because God is true to his word. You've been prisoners in Babylon and prisoners to fear for far too long. Remember this phrase – become "prisoners of Hope." Be captivated by a belief that God can make all things right, if we surrender to his will, and get to work!

Do you see the connection here between God's promise to come in power, hope and restoration? With no hope, God's people are sitting around, "We just can't rebuild this temple," but with hope, hope in God and his promises, they can begin the work of restoring the temple, trusting that God will restore to them double what they once had.

You have restoration work to do, too. You are the temple of the living God, and that temple needs some rebuilding. God does the work, really, but he does the work in you (Phil 2:13 – "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure) and here is what he's doing:

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the

whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.<sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Hope is stirred in a dark place. In this dark place your hope that Jesus Christ can heal you grows. And as this hope grows, you begin to do the re-building work, the restoration work that God calls you to do – **healing from Christ starts with hope in Christ.**

### Know Where Your Hope Is

Gregg shared last week about the hard decisions he had to make about his daughter thirteen years ago. I totally connected with that, because at about the same time, we were in the same dark place with our son. Making the call to pull him out of school and send him to rehab was about the hardest thing I have done. I don't remember thinking my hope was in Christ, but I knew where my hope **wasn't** – it wasn't in me any more. Really, I had no choice but to hope in the power of Christ – whatever other options for hope we thought might work – strong family, firm boundaries, consequences, etc. – my hope in those things were gone.

You are in recovery because your hope at some point was in anything but Jesus Christ. I'm talking about functional hope here. You could sing songs like, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness," but functionally you were hoping in your own ability to change, or you were hoping that all your problems would go away when someone else changes.

But real healing starts when you know that your hope is in Jesus Christ. So, when I say, "know where your hope is," I intend that to mean, "know

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<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Eph 2:19–22). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Jesus Christ.” Study him. Read a lot about him. Understand his purpose for coming to earth to die for you. The more you really know Jesus, and this is a lifetime project, the more hope you will have to move you to healing when you find yourself in the dark places.

### God Creates Hope in You

This leads me to say that it is God who creates hope in you. Gregg and I can both look back and see the hand of God giving us a vague sense of hope even as we made difficult decisions in dark places. I knew enough about him that I could trust him – I had no choice, but I had a sense of hope, and in hindsight it came from him. Let me suggest how God creates hope in us:

He reminds us that **he has done a work for us**. God died for us. His sacrifice is the ultimate expression of love and faithfulness. In Christ Alone: “When Satan tempts you to despair, and tells you of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there, who made an end to all my sin” - remember what God has done for us – he allowed his son to be crucified, to break the power and penalty of our sin. He became sin, who knew no sin, that we might become his righteousness. He has done this work **for you**.

*Heidelberg Catechism (#52) 52. Q: How does Christ’s return “to judge the living and the dead” comfort you?*

*A: In all my distress and persecution I turn my eyes to the heavens and confidently await as Judge the very One who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me.*

Secondly, he reminds us that **he is doing a work in us**. Why are you here tonight? I know. You are here because God is doing a work in you. Some of you nod your head, because you feel him at work in you, even tonight. Some of you



are shaking your head, because 1) you really don't feel him working in you or 2) because you say I have no idea who you are or how hard your circumstances are.

But I know. Feelings come and feelings go – never trust your feelings, even when they seem so positive. It is a good gift to feel God's presence, but he'll remove his presence to grow our hope in him. Our feelings about God doing a work in us are irrelevant. And it's true that I don't know some of you – again, so what? I know God. I know his love and his faithfulness to all those he has created. I know his character is to pursue you for as long as you live. I have faith that he has pursued you to Celebrate Recovery. I believe it, not because I know you, but because I know God.

Thirdly, God creates hope in us by promising that **he will do a work in us**. Francis Schaeffer talks about “substantial healing” in this lifetime. The Serenity Prayer tells us that we can be “reasonably happy” in this life. Healing starts with hope, but it is healing that God promises to do in us. The work of recovery that God does in us is to restore us to sanity – it is his plan to change us in the midst of our circumstances, not necessarily to change our circumstances. That is a far better gift. Tim's testimony was that every time things got tough for him, he changed his circumstances by changing locations. He could change his circumstances, but he couldn't change himself – only God could, but God has – it is his promise.

#### With Hope Comes Healing

So – know where your hope is, even tonight. Keep a laser focus on Jesus as your hope – do not be tempted to hope in anyone or anything else. Know that God creates hope in you – be reminded of the work he has done for you, the

work he is doing in you, and the work he will do in you. God creates lasting hope in you by reminding you of this work.

And finally, remember that with hope comes healing. Jesus said that he came to heal the sick: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”<sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”<sup>8</sup> There is a dominant theme in Scripture that links sin and sickness, repentance and healing. In so many cases, we get better physically when we embrace recovery, but it’s the soul healing that is primary.

One of the most graphic pictures of sin and disease in the Bible is leprosy. Leprosy was a hideous skin disease, with no known cure, and if you had it, you were cut off from fellowship with God’s people. You were destined to a life of hopelessness.

Our sin has made us spiritual lepers. As alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or food, or anger, or resentment, or anxiety have consumed us, we become cut off from fellowship with God and his people, apparently destined to a life of hopelessness.

But Jesus loves lepers! He touches them! They are physically cleaned and spiritually forgiven. There are many examples of this in Scripture, but listen to this account in Mark (also recorded in Matthew and Luke):

<sup>40</sup> And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.”<sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.”<sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.<sup>43</sup> And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once,

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<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Lk 5:31–32). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>44</sup> and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”<sup>9</sup>

The leper, in the darkness and despair of his condition, hoped Jesus could heal him. His faith was not yet strong, but he had hope, and so, moving from hopelessness to hope, he approached Jesus, who was moved by his condition, even as he is moved by ours. He touches him, which is so symbolically important – God is holy. There can be no unclean thing before him, but Jesus engages us in our unclean-ness; he touches us, and makes us clean, able to enter the temple. Imagine the Pharisees as this healed leper shows up at church for the first time – what a statement of the power of God!

This is who we are in Christ. We are just spiritual lepers who have been washed clean by the blood of Christ. It is the work that God has done for us. And as we enter step two, still insane, still dealing with leprosy, we begin to hope that Christ can restore us to sanity and heal us. And the Gospel in step 2 is that Jesus says to you, “I am willing – I am doing a work in you and I will complete this work.” And he says to you, even tonight, “be clean.”

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<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Mk 1:40–44). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.