

# Romans 8:18-30 - Hope: The One Thing You Can't Lose in the Middle of Suffering

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Preacher: Andy Kind

[ 0 : 00 ] And I've been in the area, so I asked Simon and Laurie if I could stay with them. And Simon said, would you like to preach? And it's slightly unfair on me.

I do want to let you know it's slightly unfair on me because as a visiting preacher, as someone who travels to preach, a guest speaker by trade, if you like, I cheat because what I'm able to do is to do one talk throughout the year that gets better and more learned and more learned throughout the year.

And so I turn up in all these places where they're used to people using notes, and I don't use notes. And people say, oh, well, who was that guy who's just disappeared into the mist? Whereas today, you'll see I have basically the yellow pages of notes here.

So as a result, I may seem less boorish, less loutish than normal, which is a bit of a treat for you all. So what you're getting instead is what the gamers call early access to next year's visiting preach. So we're going to talk about hope, but it is a delight to be with you.

[ 1 : 09 ] And I take it very seriously, particularly when you've got someone like Simon Lawrenson, who is one of the best Bible teachers I've ever met. When he invites you to share the stage or the laminate flooring in this case, it's a real privilege.

So thank you. We're not too far away from Christmas. And I wonder what you're hoping for as Christmas comes.

I wonder what you're hoping for. Maybe remote-controlled socks. Maybe a new Wendy house, Joe. You don't have a Wendy house.

Well, a Wendy house at all would be great. But the point is, when I say Christmas is coming and I wonder what you're hoping for, instinctively you start to think of presents. If I change the wording slightly and I say, I wonder what you're longing for.

I wonder what you're yearning for. All of a sudden, that person I'm talking to isn't thinking about Christmas presents anymore. Because there's a difference between a Christmas wish and Christmas hope.

[ 2 : 27 ] When I say to someone, I wonder what you're longing for. They're not thinking about a gift. They start to think about something deeper. And I guarantee, and don't worry, we're not going to find out what you're all longing for.

But we do all have longings and yearnings. And I guarantee they're about one of two things. They're about connection, usually in the form of relationship. And they're about justice.

What are you longing for? I long for that person to come back. I long for that friendship to be restored. I long for that situation to be put right.

That's very different from hoping that you'll come downstairs to a Wendy house, Joe. But don't worry. I think you're in luck this year. Just to let you know. And I want to talk about hope because the word hope is everywhere.

But its roots, its real deep roots back into the deep magic of the universe are uniquely Christian. So what I want to do today is to talk about what hope is, what it isn't.

[ 3 : 35 ] And why we ultimately can only find its source in Jesus. Hope in a Christian sense has much more to do with an expectant yearning than it does to do with wishing upon a star.

So an example of this, a friend of mine, youngish lad. He's really the son of one of my best friends. He and I were watching one of the Harry Potter films a while ago.

And he was obsessed with Harry Potter. And he said, he paused the film and he said, if only this sort of stuff was true, maybe I wouldn't be so sad all the time.

And it really impacted me. It made me feel very sad. But also I thought, yes, this is it. You see, this is the difference. He watches Harry Potter and he feels this longing for a world that he doesn't see. Now, I watch Harry Potter and I can say, but it is. This stuff is true. Now, what I don't mean is that magic is real, that there really are wizards, that there really is a Hogwarts.

[ 4 : 50 ] But the whole point of Harry Potter really is to show that there is something beyond this world which is transcendental. There is a magic, in inverted commas, a transcendence beyond this world that we cannot see.

And yet, as Christians, we believe we will ultimately get to. So I was able to say to my friend, yeah, Hogwarts is not real. But the stuff that you're feeling, that sense of hope and longing, that has a source.

That's not an accident. You are wired to feel that way. So the Christian idea of hope is not wishing upon a star. It has much more to do with an expectant yearning.

Romans 8.24 says, We do not hope for what we already have. We do not hope for what we already have.

What's really interesting about hope is that it's a pace setter. Hope is a pace setter. Do you know in a race you have a pace setter that keeps the runners racing?

[ 5 : 59 ] And eventually the pace setter stops and the race goes on to finish. Hope, in a Christian sense, is a pace setter. It is always ahead of us. Always slightly out of reach.

But yet it sets the pace for where we're going. In that respect, hope is always prophetic. We do not hope for what we already have.

If you think about, again, if you just think about a longing, I'm longing for the pizza I'm going to have on my birthday. I can't wait for it.

I'm so expectant. I'm yearning for it. I'm so hungry. Once you get to... Yeah, he's like, yeah, yes.

You're preaching to the choir now, brother. Once you get to your birthday and you get to the restaurant and you eat the pizza, you might love it and you might enjoy it, take joy from it, but you're no longer longing for it.

You're no longer hoping for it because it's arrived then, hasn't it? So hope is prophetic. It's been wired into the universe as the pace setter for the human soul.

[ 7 : 10 ] Christmas morning is another good example of that. I don't know whether you'd all agree with this, but for me, the hope and the excitement I felt on Christmas morning before I opened my presents was a greater feeling than the feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction just after I'd opened my presents.

Hope is a powerful driver, but once hope has been fulfilled, it's no longer hope. And this is why hope is so fascinating, why I want to talk about what it is and what it isn't.

Because you can survive for weeks without food. I've never tried it and I don't plan to. But you can survive for weeks without food. You can survive for days without water.

You can survive for minutes without air. But you cannot live without hope. No human being can live without hope.

Air will keep your brain alive. Hope keeps your soul alive. And we don't need hope because we might die today.

[ 8 : 20 ] We don't need hope because at some point today we might die. We all need hope because we've got to get up tomorrow and live. Because we've got to get up tomorrow and function and live.

And not just exist. Not just tick along. Hope is the beacon fire across the moor that keeps the weary traveler plodding on.

Hope is the whisper in the ear of the paralyzed man that says, Your sins are forgiven. Get up and walk. Hope is always prophetic. And it's wired into you for that reason.

Hope is the beacon fire. We are supposed to be always slightly out of reach of hope. But don't worry because we'll get to what happens when we do finally catch up with it. We do not hope for what we already have.

And as somebody who uses, who writes stories for a living, I like to use words correctly. And hope is bandied around all the time. And so this is why we're trying to distinguish it from its Christian roots, you see.

[ 9 : 31 ] Because words do change. For instance, if I said, and I'm not, but if I said I'm ambidextrous, I'm an ambidexter, what would you think that meant in today? What does that mean in today's society?

Yes, I can use both hands. That's not the root of the word ambidexter. In the 16th century, an ambidexter was somebody who took bribes from each side of a legal dispute.

So one hand he'd take a bribe, the other hand he'd take a bribe. So if you went back to the 1600s and said, guys, I'm an ambidexter, they wouldn't be applauding you and asking you to paint two simultaneous paintings.

They'd have you put in the stocks. So the connotation of words change over time. You like the ambidexter fact, don't you? I think some of you are going to be using that before on the run.

Yeah, on the run up to Christmas. So what isn't hope? What isn't it? Hope, Christian hope, is not wishful thinking.

[10:32] Hope is not wishful thinking. Wishful thinking would be me saying, with great gusto, when my hair grows back, I hope it's long and curly like Poldock.

That is wishful thinking to the point of being fantasy, to the point of being nonsense. Christian hope is not wishful thinking.

It is unseen, but it is certain of what it does not see. Hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is not simply positive thinking.

We've all probably had job interviews that we've gone into, and they haven't gone well, and we know we haven't got them, because you're turned up on horseback in armour for no reason, and it just didn't land.

And you didn't want to be the senior pastor of Calvary Church in Southampton anyway, but you shouldn't have done it. But then there's your friends. There's always a friend who'll say, oh no, just think positive.

[11:41] Stay positive. Now, positive thinking is not completely erroneous, because it is psychologically helpful. If you think positively about something, it will guard you against despair for a little while, until the negative arrives.

When you get the call saying, we don't know where you got the armour, or the horse, and you certainly haven't got the job, because we're not looking to get rid of Simon. At that point, your positive thinking shows itself to be vapour, vacuous, nonsensical.

So Christian hope is not positive thinking. Positive thinking is psychologically helpful, but it doesn't impact the outcome of a situation. And when the positive turns into a negative, what we often do is topple over into despair.

Another thing that hope is not, hope is not the opposite of lament. Hope is not the opposite of lament.

You know, sometimes you see people just, maybe you don't see them, but people, you're crying out to God, you're complaining to God. And our instinct, our cultural instinct to say, oh no, don't worry, be hopeful, be positive.

[13:04] But lament is not the opposite of hope. Lament to the outsider looks a lot like despair, but it is actually a guard against it.

The people who lament, and we see this in the Psalms all the time, the people who lament are not despairing, because they haven't given up hope that justice may yet be done.

The people who lament, when you lament, when you're screaming at God, even as you're saying, am I flipping invisible to you? You're at least still talking to the person who might do something about it.

When it comes to despair, it's the quiet ones you've got to watch. So hope is not the opposite of lament. Lament actually holds hands with hope, because those who lament, we are decrying injustice.

We are asking for things to be put right. But right in the center of that lament is the hope that it might yet all be well. Does that make sense so far?

[14:16] So hope is not wishful thinking. It's not positive thinking. Because positive thinking topples over to despair when the negative comes. When we have hope, and we hold hands with lament, although that can be painful, it guards against despair.

And this is why Christian hope can seem silly to an outsider. In 1 Samuel, Hannah is, she's lamenting, she's praying for, she's praying for a child.

And Eli sees her praying, sees her sort of talking to God, and assumes that she's drunk. Yeah. Oh, you're reading it now.

Oh, that's fantastic. That's brilliant. Yeah, that is amazing. And you're amazing. You are. Be positive. But Eli, Eli sees the lament and thinks that she's drunk. He says, oh, you need to get rid of that wine. Christian hope can seem very strange to people who are not Christians, because it can look like wishful thinking.

[15:27] It can look like pie in the sky. But it can also look like something that's not positive thinking. And our culture is just all about positive, positive, positive.

Think positively. Think positively. Christian hope is aware of the fact that actually not everything turns out well. And we're going to look at that. So I've done my first page of notes already.

I will need them for next time. I stole these pieces of card from Life Church, Southampton, last night. They were in my green room. And I took them.

Yeah, that's my public confession. This is my confession. Yeah, not forgiven. Oh, no. Well, the preacher was going well.

He took a turn for the worse when he confessed to grand larceny. Let's get back to hope. Christian hope is not the belief that any given situation will turn out well.

[16:30] Now, of course, there are specific instances in Scripture. We see it with Hannah, where there's a specific thing that she thinks God has promised her. And she's praying and she's having hope for that outcome.

And we see with, it's talked about in Romans, we see with Abraham, that he was, you know, so old. There was no way he was going to have a child.

But God had told him, you're going to be a father to nations. And it said, against all hope, Abraham hoped.

I think it's in the message. It says, but Abraham hoped anyway. So that's great. And that's a specific response to a specific thing that God has said.

So hope can work in situations. If God has actually, absolutely revealed something in a situation, then the right thing to do is to be positive, to focus your hope on that outcome.

[17:33] Absolutely. Abraham hoped against hope because God had said. And it was credited to him as righteousness. And I do believe that even when we're hoping for things that end up not turning out well, I do believe that our hopefulness and our lament is credited to us as righteousness.

I think if we're, even if we're mistaken about what we're hoping for and what we're hoping in, my own personal belief is that when we're putting our trust in the God of miracles, even if that specific miracle isn't coming, I think that's credited to us as righteousness.

Because again, we're putting our hope and our trust in the person of Jesus. And that is never a bad place to be. But hope, in a more general sense, and I think this is where we can fall down as Christians.

Because we look at things like Abraham, we look at things like Hannah, we look at people like Joseph, and we say, well, there's scriptural precedent for this. Therefore, this situation that I'm in that I may not have prayed about, I'm just going to assume that the best outcome will happen because we see it happen in specific instances in scripture.

And I think this is where Christians can fall down and make a mistake. And if you like mistake, hope in the micro for hope in the macro.

[18:59] Christian hope is not just the mindless, albeit well-meaning belief that any given situation will turn out well, that your desired outcomes will come to pass.

But it is the belief that there is a power in the universe that is working for your good, working for your best.

So it's a slight distinction. And again, this is why words take on different meanings because the distinctions seem quite close to one another. But it's a distinction between thinking, this situation will turn out for the best, and in this situation, there is a person working for my best.

And unfortunately, I know too many people who've fallen away from faith because they didn't understand that distinction. Because they prayed and they hoped about certain situations where God hadn't promised the desired outcome, and they didn't get it.

And we all know what hope deferred does. It makes the heart sick. Hope is the killer that keeps you alive, often, if we don't put it in quite the right thing.

[20:07] So what we have to do is to put our hope in the right place, in the right person.

If our hope is always in Jesus, regardless of what happens in this given situation, we will guard against, it will be credited to it as righteousness, we will guard against despair, and we won't have

that same horrible sickness at the pit of our stomach that we all know, we've all had that, when we've really, for a long time, desired a situation and it hasn't happened.

And we go past lament to simply the exit. I know too many people who've done that because they've put their hope in what God might do rather than who God is regardless of what he does in the situation.

And this is where we start to see why hope, which is wired into every human heart and every human soul, can only be found in Jesus. I will loop back to this later.

We are wired for hope. We are wired to believe that there is a power working for our good.

[ 21 : 29 ] I think most people we speak to of any worldview would hope that there is a power working for their good. Even people who believe in things like cosmic ordering, the idea that you say thank you to the universe every morning, or you say thank you for what's going to happen, it's positive thinking, but there are certain results that sometimes happen because the universe is wired for hope.

The universe is wired with faith in it. Faith, trust, they have a positive impact because of the way the universe has been set up. But again, a power cannot be on your side.

Powers are impersonal. So if you're on a beach and a tidal wave comes in and the tidal wave just gently guides you to shore, you wouldn't say, I'm so glad that tidal wave was on my side, that powerful tidal wave was on my side.

It's not on your side. It's just random. You just didn't drown in that tidal wave. Only people, only persons can be on your side.

So the existence of hope, the belief that lots of people that we know have, that there must be a power on their side, falls down when you realize that only persons can be on your side.

[ 22 : 49 ] So hope, when it's linked to the belief that powers are at work on your side for your good, point to the person, point to the person of Jesus because those we'll come back to later.

the idea of a personal God working for you is much more rare in religion and philosophy than people would like to think it is.

So hope starts to point us to Jesus even as we experience it because if there is no God, then hope is a cosmic prank.

If there is no God, hope is a trick. It's breadcrumbs to a gingerbread house where the witch is ready to eat you. Friedrich Nietzsche, who was a great philosopher, atheist philosopher, said, hope is the most evil of all evils because it simply prolongs the torment of man.

Simply gives you an idea that maybe things will turn out. But obviously, if there is no God, then the great reward for your hope is extinction, is annihilation, obliteration. Hope is tricking you.

[ 24 : 09 ] So this prophetic pace setter that you have guiding you through life is a prank story, Jeremy Beadle, Noel Edmonds. I know some of you won't get those references, but how often do you hear Jeremy Beadle and Noel Edmonds mentioned in a priest?

Almost never. Almost never. Not everything we hope for, not everything we wish, not everything we desire happens, and hope deferred makes the heart sick.

We need to put hope, our hope, not in what we think Jesus will do, but in who we know Jesus is, regardless of what he might do.

This is where we need to put our hope. I have an example of this. I don't like to be too autobiographical when I'm preaching, but it is relevant. And some of you will know this, some of you won't, but eight years ago, eight years ago next month, Mrs. Kind decided she didn't want to be Mrs. Kind anymore.

And so the marriage that I was part of separated and has not been redeemed. And obviously, as a Christian man who hadn't done anything disqualifying, I had hoped that it would be restored because I thought, well, it should be.

[ 25 : 31 ] It's just an aberration. It will be okay in the end. And so I hoped and hoped and hoped and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and lamented and lamented and lamented that God would bring back that marriage because God loves marriage and he hates divorce.

I think those things are true. After three years of hoping for that thing, I was sick. I was not only sick, I was emotionally paralyzed and spiritually defunct.

And I'd really, I'd stopped lamenting because it just felt like I was invisible. And it's exhausting as well, isn't it?

Banging on a door, a specific door that doesn't open is just exhausting. But I'm not, what I'm not saying is God doesn't answer prayers.

What I'm saying is I had to shift. This is an example of the point I'm trying to make. I had to shift from putting my hope in a desired outcome even though I think it was a good, godly outcome to desire and an outcome that I'm sure God did desire all things being equal.

[ 26 : 42 ] I had to change my shift from a desired outcome to simply the nature and character of God.

I had to stop believing for a miracle but not lose faith in the God of miracles.

Again, they're quite, they're next door neighbours, aren't they? But they do not live the same life. I had to stop believing for a miracle but to keep my hope in the God of miracles.

Sometimes you just need to shift your belt one notch as lots of us will have to do after Christmas. You know after Christmas when you've over eaten and you've somehow gone up a shoe size because that's how much you've eaten and your belt doesn't fit.

This is a belt. This is my belt. I've worn this before. I've put these trousers on and this belt on before and it worked as I wanted it to. Now it doesn't. Okay, you can still wear that belt too tight.

[ 27 : 50 ] It will still do what a belt does but you'll be uncomfortable. You'll be very uncomfortable and ultimately in pain. Just shift it one notch and start and get Strava open and start walking.

I'm just trying to give some pictorial analogies. Sometimes we just have to switch switch our perspective reframe it slightly on what hope is and what hope isn't.

Second page down. It's nice using notes. Yes, thank you sir. It's nice using notes. Because again, and I think probably we all agree with this.

I know Simon would agree with this as someone who exhibits such wisdom. What's nice whenever I see Simon, we see each other a couple of times a year and I think each time we see each other we've got slightly more humanly grumpy than we were last time but slightly more spiritually hopeful. And what I really despise is tricks in preaching. It's very easy for preachers to infect their audience with dopamine.

[ 29 : 03 ] It's very, very easy for a preacher to come out and say, are you going through a situation? I think you're struggling at the moment. Oh wow.

Oh really? You think they're human beings that were struggling with something. But then people are like, oh wow, yeah that's me, he's talking to me. But guess what? I'm assuming he's American, they usually are.

Your breakthrough's around the corner. Yeah, exactly. Because that's what they want to hear.

That's their note to Santa who in this case looks like Jesus.

Your breakthrough. And so that person who thought this guy's talking about me has then heard your breakthrough's around the corner. And so that feels like hope.

But it's not automatically hope because that preacher does not know that your breakthrough is right. If you're saying to an entire room of Christians with very different narratives that their breakthrough is around the corner, that isn't prophecy, that's horoscoping.

[ 30 : 09 ] It's horoscoping. Sometimes breakthroughs are around, are coming, because the author of life loves a redemption story.

The great news, and this is why we can talk about hope and we can frame it in this way without despairing, ultimately, every tear will be wiped dry. Ultimately, every knee will bow.

Things will be put right. God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself. That is the arc that we're on. But it's not automatically around the corner.

Also, breakthroughs don't go around anything. They go through. They go through. It's grammatically, verbally, nonsensical. Your breakthroughs around the corner.

And if we keep hearing that and we think my breakthroughs are around the corner, by the time we've gone through, the thing that's broken is us and our sense of hope. Because optimism, blind optimism, is the enemy of hope.

[ 31 : 15 ] It's optimism which is the killer that keeps you alive, really. Another thing, and there's a Forrest Frank song. I love Forrest Frank. Probably my favorite Christian artist and my daughters and I listen to him quite a lot.

But there's a lyric in one of his songs that says, when one door closes, a better one gets opened. And at that point, I was thinking, no, that's not true. It's not the case.

And this is where certain preachers, when I say certain, I just mean general, I don't mean Joe or anything like that. I'm not being pointed in the room. Certain preachers say, when God closes one door, it's because he's going to open a better one.

You know that isn't true. You know from your life. You don't come home from a bad day at work and say, well, that means I'm going to have a good day tomorrow. It's Fisher-Price theology.

It's nonsense. God's got something better for you. What God will always do, or rather, what God will never do, is leave you without a path towards redemption.

[ 32 : 23 ] He will never leave you without an escape route out of your situation. That is true. God will never do that. But it's not true that if something that one door closes, a better one's going to open.

Another one, yeah. At some point. But it's probably not around the corner. Sometimes you've got to sit in the grave. If the Lord had to sit in the grave for three days, maybe we have to sit in the grave for a bit as well.

God's got something better for you. God's got someone better for you. You know that's not true as well. It's not automatically true, and we shouldn't say it because it's facile and facetious.

When a loved one dies, it's not the case that God's got a better grandmother for you. Don't worry about your grandmother dying.

God's got a better one for you. What are you talking about? I am trying to be humorous, but I'm also trying to make genuine points. Hope is not a formula.

[ 33 : 26 ] God is not a formula. God is a person. He's not just a random power that we can wield and turn into spells if we say the right words in the right way. He is a person, and he has billions of storylines running parallel to one another, and ours is one of them.

And in the end, it will turn out well, but we might not. We might not see all of these storylines redeemed on this side of glory. So I do hope, if you are in a situation, I do hope your breakthrough is around the corner, but it might not be, and that isn't Christian hope.

Christian hope is that you are in the one story that ends with guaranteed redemption and not guaranteed catastrophe. There's the hope.

And again, it does end well. There will come a point. We talked about hope being a pace setter, didn't we? We talked about hope being prophetic because it's always slightly ahead of us. There will come a point, and we do see glimpses of it in little situations, but in your life in general, in your life in the universe, there will come a point, and it might be at death, where your hope, the hope you have invested in your life, will stop running away from you and will turn and will come back towards you and embrace you.

And at that point, you'll realize that it wasn't hope or it's not called hope anymore. Now it's called joy. Hope becomes joy, which is no longer hope because it doesn't need to be.

[ 35 : 12 ] When we get there, when we get there, hope isn't necessary. Hope won't be necessary in heaven because it will just be undiluted joy.

There will come a point when your hope will become joy. And we do see this in little glimpses, don't we? We have this hope as what?

As an anchor for our soul. But if you think about anchors, anchors do keep, they keep you anchored in a storm.

But in that analogy is the idea that, oh yeah, but we're not sailing out to sea yet. We haven't hit the high seas of glory yet.

We have this hope as an anchor for our soul. And at some point, the Lord will raise the anchor and we'll be out to sea and it will be joyous and it will be glorious and it will be redemptive.

[ 36 : 10 ] But we have this hope as an anchor just to keep us here, to keep us where we are, to stop us from toppling over, to stop us from drifting. So what we're not saying, because what I, it's even hard for me to hear this stuff even though I believe this because again, we all get slightly infected by terminology.

What we're not saying, what we're not arguing against here is the idea of a fullness of life. What we're not saying is that God doesn't love to bless. What we're not saying is that everything's going to be rubbish but don't worry because at some point you'll be in heaven.

We're not saying, I'm not saying, don't worry about anything, just wait till you get to heaven. What we are saying is, just you wait until you get to heaven.

It will all make sense. Some things will be redeemed, some little hopes will become big joys in this life but not everything.

But hope is always prophetic both in the small and the large. Not everything's going to get sorted out this side of eternity. On the other side, everything will be.

[ 37 : 28 ] Everything will be. So let's take these little glimpses as shadows of things to come as the writer of Hebrews says. Shadows of things to come.

When our hopes become joys, when we open our presents on Christmas mornings and we have that satisfaction, they're all little signposts, they're all little snippets, they're all breadcrumbs to a house where not a witch is waiting for you but where the Lord is waiting for you with many rooms and he's prepared one of them for you.

I'll tell you about a guy called Danny and this is just an example of, again, how we have these glimpses that point to something eternal.

So I used to work as an evangelist in Chesterfield and I was running an alpha course in a pub in Chesterfield. This is about six years ago.

It is six years ago. And we had this one lad called Danny. He was a tattoo artist. He gave me that tattoo actually. And he came from a difficult background and I think he was dating someone in the church and he came along to Alpha and partway through Alpha, week four or something, he was really starting to get it and he wanted prayer.

[ 38 : 50 ] And so me and this other guy called Des, Des Lena is his name, if you want to, if you don't believe me, we're praying for him in this function room in a pub in Chesterfield.

I can't even remember the name of the pub. But we're praying, Des said, and Lord, we just pray that the fire of God would fall on Danny. It's one of those very good sort of charismatic, evangelical things that you say to make yourself sound good when you're praying.

Pray that the fire of God would fall on Danny. At this moment, exact moment, the fire alarm in the pub goes off and we all have to leave. And we're joking.

We're like, oh, that was a fun coincidence, wasn't it? And we were, it was probably our prayers that did that, lads, lads, lads. But we didn't mean it. And there's lots of people in the pub. The main pub's been cleared, the function room's been cleared.

And eventually, we're allowed to go back in and we're still laughing about it, but we get back on with Alpha. About a minute later, the door to the function room opens and the landlady comes in and says, is everything okay in here?

[ 39 : 54 ] I said, yeah, well, all right, thank you. She said, it's because I've just looked at the schematic and the fire was coming from this room. I was like, yeah, praise the Lord. Anyway, that's a lovely story in and of itself.

I caught up with Danny recently. I caught up with Danny earlier this year. And life has continued to be really hard for him. Life has got worse for him than it was.

His Facebook bio still says, child of God though. So he did become a Christian and he had a bit of a boon. He was having a lovely time for a while and he felt blessed.

But his life is now really hard again. Some of that might be his fault. Some of it might not be. But I said, I'm sorry that you're going through this. He said, do you remember the fire of God from that pub though?

I said, yes, I do remember it. We have this hope as an anchor for our soul. We have these hopes and these experiences as prophetic pointers to what is to come.

[ 41 : 02 ] So we should expect, because God loves to bless, we should expect to have good things happen. We should expect to have, to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

But they're only signposts. If we see them as ultimates, we're going to, eventually we're going to stumble, we're going to fall, we're going to fade away. The ultimate hope is simply Jesus.

The ultimate hope. I wrote a story called Easter Bunny Incorporated in my children's book. And the story is about the Easter Bunny.

He's called Jeremy. He's in the family business, works as the Easter Bunny. And he's struggling being the Easter Bunny because he feels overworked. And it was easy, there is a point at the end of this.

He's overworked because in the past, his ancestor just had to deliver eggs. And now, children are writing him letters and you do see children writing to the Easter Bunny.

[ 42 : 07 ] And he says, they're writing me letters asking for help with their problems. And he goes to find Father Christmas and Father Christmas is in a, he's also in the family business and he's also travel sick.

He was sick over Tokyo the previous year, it turns out. And he says, yes, we're symbols of hope for kids but they keep asking for help with their lives to bring back their dead pets or to get their mom and dad back together.

And Father Christmas and the Easter Bunny say, we can't give them that sort of gift. We weren't cut out for that sort of gift. We're symbols of hope. Then there's a knock on the door and you'll never guess who turns up.

That's right, the Lord. He turns up and he reassures them. He says, you guys are symbols of hope but hope is a symbol of me.

So this is the thing. Jesus is not a symbol of hope. Hope is a symbol of Jesus. Hope is a guaranteed down payment that hope is not a trick.

[ 43 : 10 ] Hope is a guaranteed down payment that ultimately it will switch into joy because of what we see Jesus do on the cross because of the promise of the gospel.

Jesus is not a symbol of hope. Hope is a symbol of Jesus. Optimism puts us to shame ultimately. Positive thinking puts us to shame when the thing we've been so positive about ends up negative. After 75 minutes yesterday, Southampton fans were thinking positively. By 90 minutes, they've been put to shame. No comment.

Optimism will put you to shame. Positive thinking will put you to shame. Hope does not put us to shame because it's invested in a guarantee.

The guarantee of a personal relationship. The guarantee of a saviour who is working to reconcile the universe over a long period of time but everything will ultimately be put right in the end.

[ 44 : 24 ] We have this hope as an anchor for our soul but ultimately we will set sail. The universe is... We are wired for hope. We are wired to believe that there are powers at work and the universe is rigged in our favour.

I don't know how long I've gone. I don't want to overrun. Oh yes, I've done... Yes, gosh. I've done quite a lot. I was going to talk about how it was a side mission really rather than the main story. So I won't do it because it's not relevant to the point which I think I've made quite well actually. Even if I do say so myself.

But if anyone who knows me, that is the sort of thing I would say. Yeah, so we'll miss that. That's absolutely fine to miss that bit out. In the same way that hope is prophetic, addiction is a false prophet.

If you think about what addiction does, it seems to give us those moments of joy which then demand to be brought back and brought back bigger and bigger and more and more. People get addicted because they put hope in the thing they're about to consume that it will bring them the thing that they want.

[ 45 : 38 ] It's a false prophet. Hope is a prophet. It's prophetic. But it's not false because ultimately we have this conviction, the evidence of things not seen, that the promise will be fulfilled, that it's not a trick.

Everything that's not eternal is eternally out of date. Because the other mistake that people make is thinking that hope can stop once you do get what you're hoping for.

It's like, oh, I'm happy. How are you doing? Oh, yeah, I'm really happy. Great. For how long? How long will you be happy for? Again, we all know this, but maybe we don't think about it too much.

The greatest relationships in human history have ended with a funeral. The strongest and longest lasting friendships and marriages end with one person standing over the casket of another.

What happens then? What happens when happiness goes? What do you hope for then? Positive thinking won't do anything for you then.

[ 47 : 00 ] When the specter of death, when the great enemy turns up, you need a power greater. You need something that takes away the sting of death.

We find it not just in a random power, but in the person of Jesus who says, yes, death is a real thing and on this side of the grave has quite a big say in things.

But ultimately, it's an imposter. It's a false prophet. Hope keeps us going through the valley of the shadow of death.

Pace sets us through the valley of the shadow of death. Knowing that from the hills is coming the rescue. In some contexts, it's just Jesus.

In some contexts, it is heaven. We don't want to just think about, we don't want to just think too much about heaven and ignore this life. But we don't want to neglect the fact that actually what's to come is way better than what we've got.

[ 48 : 07 ] Paul says, I desire to depart. Well, thanks, mate. Well, just leave us here on our own. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

We've got to stay in this situation and work things out while there's work to do. But it's okay to desire to depart because what's coming is better by far. We can hold those things in tension.

So we're coming up to the end now. Oh, right. No, I know. I got it. So...

Yeah, so just one final point, really, to bring it back to Jesus and why hope is only really fulfilled in Jesus and why hope is a real...

Why hope is a symbol of Jesus, not the other way around. Because you can't have hope without suffering. Again, when we've got what we need, we don't long for it anymore. The reason we have hope is because we live in a world that is broken and we're suffering.

[ 49 : 17 ] And so we hope for ways out of the suffering. We hope for things beyond the suffering. But what do other religions say about suffering?

Now, in a lot of Eastern thought, suffering is simply described as maya, which is illusion. Suffering is not to be seen as real in certain Eastern thought.

In Buddhism, suffering is to be detached from. Suffering is a problem, but it's to be detached from.

So in certain Eastern thought, your desire, because desire is the enemy, desire of anything leads to suffering, so you don't desire anything.

And then you don't worry about the suffering in the same way. So your desire to see an end to child slavery and your desire to sleep with another man's wife, for instance, they have equal value in some of these Eastern worldviews.

Because the simple aim is to detach from them. What you need to do is detach from the desire to avoid the suffering. Maya is illusory.

[ 50 : 33 ] So suffering is illusory in some thought. Suffering is to be detached from in some thought. What we see at the cross, of course, is Jesus saying, no, suffering is a real problem. It is a real problem.

It can't be detached from. Let me do something about it. Colossians 2.15, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

In a world without suffering, in a world where suffering is illusory, in a world where suffering is just to be detached from or not taken seriously, as an urban myth, we don't need hope.

The fact that every single person you know understands that suffering is not an urban myth, that their pain is real, that they do have hope for something better. If they follow those breadcrumbs, if they follow those signposts, there is only one place it leads, which is to a small hill in first century Palestine, where X marks the spot.

That's where our treasure is. So let's reflect on that. Let's reflect on. We don't need to just think positively. We don't need to engage in wishful thinking.

[ 51 : 48 ] We don't need to be mindless optimists. We don't need to believe, and we shouldn't believe, that everything is going to turn out well. But nevertheless, there is a God who is with us in the situations that we're in, who is with us in the grave, and does know the way out, and ultimately, at some point, in different ways, in both the small and the large, will lead us out, lead us in his train to glory.

Suffering is real. Some things are going to end badly. Some desires are not going to happen. Lots of prayers will not be answered with a yes. But all prayers are essentially answered with a, but I am. But I am. No to this. But I am. Keep following that pace setter of hope in the little situations, and praise God when the things you pray for happen.

But that's not the end game. In the end game, hope will turn, stop running, come towards you, embrace you, and you will call her joy at that point.

Because we are co-heirs with Christ, who is the heir to all things, which means that we do get the good stuff, but we also get the suffering. We also get the persecution sometimes.

[ 53 : 20 ] We also get the pain. That's what it means to be fully human. That's what it means to be made in the image of God. That's what it means to be co-heirs. We don't detach from suffering. We

don't dismiss it. We don't ignore it.

We don't say, this shouldn't happen. We face it with a stiff upper lip, and we keep walking slowly behind hope, knowing that it knows where it's going.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you.