

1. We're going to start a new series today.
2. I am giving this series the title "Hope Dealers".
3. Not to be confused with dope dealers.
4. True story. When I was a freshman in high school, because of a shortage of lockers, it was necessary for all freshman to share a locker with someone else.
5. My locker partner that year was a guy named Vince. Vince and I had known each other since the second grade.
6. His last name started with the letter B, and mine started with the letter C.
7. So, we had been in the same home room together since second grade, and I thought I knew him pretty well.
8. In the first or second week of our sophomore year, both of us now having our own lockers, I was shocked to learn that one day the sheriff's office had brought in drug sniffing dogs, and it was discovered that Vince had drugs in his locker.
9. On top of that it was determined that Vince was in fact dealing drugs out of his locker.
10. And then to my horror, I found out that Vince had been dealing drugs out of the locker we shared together the year before.
11. I was extremely thankful none of that affected me. However, I was also disappointed to find out that a friend had gone down that path.
12. And I know why Vince kept it a secret and kept it hidden, especially from me. He didn't want me to know he was a dope dealer.
13. But this is not a message about dope dealers. This is in fact a message about hope dealers.
14. And as hope dealers, we don't need to keep the hope that we have a secret.
15. Because, if we know Jesus Christ as our savior, we do in fact have hope. And that hope has the potential to cause a great impact, not only on our lives, but in the lives of those around us.
16. We are living in a world that desperately needs hope. Hopelessness seems to be the word of the day.

17. Hopelessness seems to be the outlook of our times. But as believers in Jesus Christ, hopelessness is not our lot in life. And together as believers, we are the carriers of that hope to a hopeless world.
18. And so, this morning I want to lay the groundwork for this series by sharing some characteristics of hope.
19. Turn with me in your bibles to the book of 2 Corinthians chapter 4.
20. I'm going to read 13 verses, but don't be alarmed we aren't going to cover all 13 verses today.

TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:5-18 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. **6** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. **7** But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. **8** We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; **9** persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. **10** We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. **11** For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. **12** So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. **13** It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, **14** because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. **15** All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. **16** Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17** For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18** So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

TITLE: Three Characteristics of Hope.

INTRO:

1. In order for us to be dealers of hope. Carriers of hope if you will, then we have to have an idea of what hope is and what hope is not.
2. What is hope?

Hope is not a thing; hope is a person.

1. Hope is not a thing. Hope is a person.
2. 2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his

light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

3. The phrase "let light shine out of darkness" is a reference to Genesis 1:2-3 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
4. The earth had been made, but the earth had no form. It wasn't yet shaped. One translation uses the word empty.
5. All translations use the word dark. There was nothing but darkness.
6. Darkness is often a perfect description of hopelessness. When we feel hopeless, we feel like we are in the dark.
7. We can't see clearly. We feel lost if you will.
8. But it was never God's plan to leave the earth, or us for that matter, in the dark. And the answer to the dark was and is light.
9. If we go back to 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul gives an explanation of that light.
10. He says the light of the knowledge of God's glory is displayed in the face of Jesus.
11. Jesus said about himself in John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
12. The solution to the darkness or hopelessness is light. And Jesus is that light. In other words, Jesus is the hope.
13. And he goes on to say, whoever follows him will never walk in darkness (hopelessness), but will have the light of life.
14. Now, that sounds like a really great promise. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.
15. I have to ask about myself, I feel like I am following Jesus, and yet at times I also feel like I am walking with a shortage of hope.
16. Maybe that doesn't describe you, but it sure does describe me at times.
17. And so, I wonder, why doesn't my experience match up with the promise Jesus gives.
18. Often times, if I will trace back where the hopeless feelings began, I will find it is because I have placed my hope in something, rather than placing my hope in someone.

19. My natural tendency, and I believe the tendency of all mankind, is to make hope a thing rather than a person.
20. And when I have relegated hope to being a thing, when I have the thing, whatever it is, then I feel hopeful. But when I don't have the thing, whatever it is, I do not feel hopeful.
21. Is that making any sense to anyone.
22. If we are going to have hope, that hope must be based on something that is not here today and gone tomorrow.
23. Rather it must be based on the one who was and is the first and the last. The beginning and the end. The constant, true, unwavering savior and that is none other than Jesus Christ.
24. So, the first characteristic of hope is that hope is not a thing, hope is a person. Jesus.
25. The second characteristic of hope is that...

Hope and struggle go hand in hand.

1. Often times I don't associate struggle with hope. In fact I have difficulty experiencing hope when I am in the midst of a struggle.
2. But this is what Paul had to say about struggle and hope.
3. **2 Corinthians 4:7-10** But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. **8** We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; **9** persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. **10** We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.
4. Paul goes on to say that we have this treasure in jars of clay.
5. What is this treasure? It is the hope that comes through Jesus Christ.
6. Hope that is based on a thing is a tragedy. But hope that is based on who Jesus Christ is, is a treasure.
7. But Paul then describes a major problem. We have this treasure in jars of clay.
8. Our being. Who we are mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally are these fragile, easily broken vessels or jars.
9. And that is a problem, because if I am carrying this hope in a vessel that can be easily damaged or broken, then I have to be really careful that I don't lose the hope.

10. So, for me. It may not be the same for you. But for me, I like to guard the hope by attempting to keep the struggles and the hope separate.
11. I am a person that believes everything has its place. I like things to be in their proper place. Because if they are in their proper place, then I know where to find them when I need them.
12. For example. If I pass out, and while I am laying on the floor and you decide you need to borrow a pocketknife. Just know that my pocketknife will always be in my front right pocket. Always.
13. If I pass out, and while I am laying on the floor you decide you need to use my car keys or borrow a quarter, those two things will always be found in my front left pocket. Always.
14. If I pass out, and while I am laying on the floor you decide you need to borrow \$5, my wallet will always be found in my back left pocket. Nowhere else.
15. And if I pass out, after you have taken my knife. Lifted my keys, and taken my money, you begin to feel sorry for me and decide to call 911, my phone will always be in my back right pocket. Always.
16. Because I like everything to be in its rightful place.
17. But if I take that preference and attempt to apply it to spiritual things, especially the principles of struggle and hope, what I have found is that it doesn't equate. It doesn't work.
18. Because if I attempt to separate struggle and hope, what I end up with is this random roller coaster ride in which I don't know how to tap into hope when I need it.
19. **Hope is not the absence of struggle.** (repeat)
20. If I put hope in this box, and I put struggle in this box, thinking that the two don't go together.
21. Then when I am struggling. Which we all struggle. Then I have removed hope from my struggle.
22. I'm here in the middle of my struggle, and hope is somewhere else. And when hope is somewhere else, I start hearing these voices that push the hope even further away.
23. I must be struggling because there is something wrong with me.
24. I must be struggling because God doesn't love me.

25. I must be struggling because I have done something wrong.
26. I must be struggling because I am unlovable.
27. How many know if we get caught up in that cycle of thinking that we will be moving in the complete opposite direction of hope?
28. And yet that is exactly one of the ways the enemy bombards our minds when we face struggle.
29. But let's suppose, along the way in my struggle, I start to get a glimmer of hope.
30. The struggle begins to ease just a bit, and I begin to feel more hopeful. When struggle and hope are separated, and it has to be one or the other, quite honestly, I don't have any clue how I get or got hope.
31. Separated, hope seems extremely random. I know I don't have it, but I'm not sure how to get it.
32. Let's suppose the Lord does a work in our lives and we move into a season of hopefulness. Praise the Lord.
33. But if hope and struggle are separated, even when I am holding onto hope, I am not fully enjoying that hope.
34. Because I have lived long enough to learn that hope doesn't last forever. Struggle will eventually return. So, I'm looking over my shoulder wondering when the other shoe will drop.
35. And if struggle and hope have to be separate, I tend to not fully enjoy the hope because at some point, I start trying to figure out how to hold on to the hope and keep the struggle at bay.
36. I don't know about you, but that doesn't sound very hopeful. And I can tell you from experience that it isn't very hopeful.
37. That's because hope and struggle are not meant to be separated, they are meant to exist together.
38. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.
39. Hard pressed but not crushed. Struggle and hope.
40. Perplexed but not in despair. Struggle and hope.
41. Persecuted but not abandoned. Struggle and hope.
42. Struck down but not destroyed. Struggle and hope.

43. Paul didn't separate struggle and hope, and neither should we.
44. When I separate struggle and hope, then hope becomes a thing. It becomes something I either have or don't have.
45. But when we put struggle and hope together, then hope becomes a person.
46. I am in this struggle. And I cannot make the struggle stop, but what I can do is be hopeful because I know that the real hope, the person of Jesus, is here with me in this struggle.
47. It's not Jesus (hope) or the struggle, it's Jesus in the struggle that brings hope.
48. And when I put Jesus in my struggle rather than trying to avoid the struggle, I realize that...

Struggle and hope are not random.

1. They are not random to God. Because God has a good plan for our struggle.
2. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
3. Hope is not a thing; it is the person of Jesus Christ. And when, rather than trying to avoid struggle, I simply allow Jesus to be lord in my struggle, I have the assurance that no matter what the struggle, Jesus is in the middle of it, working that struggle for my good.
4. I didn't say understand. We will rarely understand how good can come from the struggle when we are in the middle of the struggle.
5. But we can have assurance. Assurance of what?
6. That these light and momentary troubles are achieving something. They are creating for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
7. God's ultimate goal is not our comfort in this life, his ultimate goal is our glory in the next life.
8. We tend to do the opposite of verse 18. We fix our eyes on what we see, and lose sight of what we cannot see.

9. But what we see around us, this crazy world with all its problems, is not our final destination.
10. As believers in Jesus our final destination is a place far greater than this. It's a place called heaven.

Conclusion:

1. For non-believers, this world is as good as it gets.
2. But for believers, this is as bad as it gets. It only gets better from here.
3. Hope.
4. Hope is not a thing. It is the person of Jesus Christ.
5. And when we allow Jesus to be Lord in our struggle, rather than try and escape the struggle, we have the assurance that no matter what happens, it is for our ultimate good.
6. And that is true hope.
7. You were created to be a hope dealer.
8. You were created to live a life of victory and hope that this world cannot provide, and that this world can't take away.
9. So can we for just a moment take our eyes off of what is seen, and fix our eyes on something different.
10. Lord, I thank you that nothing this world has to offer is my hope.
11. Lord, I thank you that this world cannot take away my hope.
12. Lord, I praise you that the hope you give through Jesus Christ is superior in every way.
13. Lord, I thank you that I don't have to be afraid of struggle, because I know and believe you are with me in the struggle.
14. Lord, I praise you that I am never alone in my struggle.
15. Lord, I thank you that you have a greater plan for me than what I can see.
16. Lord, I praise you that you are always working to bring about eternal good and glory in my life.