



Second Sunday of Advent - December 8, 2013  
Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Legacy: A legacy of Hope* Psalm 132

Nelson Mandela died on Thursday at the age of 95. I believe history will assess him as one of the great men of our time. Mandela's life-longing was to see the black people of South Africa lifted out of the wickedness of apartheid. He hoped for a day when the tyranny and oppression of the white minority would be overturned. He hoped for equality... something almost unthinkable for most of his life.

In 1964, Mandela was convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the government and sentenced to life in prison. He spent 27 years there. In the earliest years on Robben Island, he was allowed one letter and one visitor every six months and spent his days breaking rocks into gravel.

In the early nineties, world pressure led to Mandela's release from prison and he began negotiations with President F.W. de Klerk for an end to apartheid. In 1994, the first free elections ever were held in South Africa and Mandela was elected president. And it is here, particularly, that his greatness was revealed. Rather than using his power to turn on the whites who had oppressed them...as Robert Mugabe had done in Zimbabwe... Mandela led a coalition of blacks and whites in one of the most incredible and peaceful transitions of power the world has ever seen. And after only one term in office, Mandela stepped down from power...and sealed his legacy.

In his trial in 1964, Mandela said this: "During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

His hope was realized. South Africa is far from a utopia. A majority of its black citizens still live in squalor. But Mandela lived to see his hope for freedom and political equality become a reality.

This morning we are talking about the legacy of hope. It's easy for us to look at Mandela's life and say, "His hope was fulfilled." It's harder when you look at

someone whose greatest hope is not fulfilled. What happens to hope then? That's what happened to King David and we grapple with it in Psalm 132. *[Read 1-12]*

We are continuing in our study of the Psalms of Ascent, fifteen psalms that were sung by Jewish pilgrims on their journeys to the great festivals of their faith in Jerusalem. But this psalm... this one is different. It is the oldest of the Psalms of Ascent. It might have been written for the coronation of King Solomon, David's son... maybe even written by King Solomon. And it is a psalm that re-tells the story of the building of the temple. Here's some background that will help you understand this psalm.

In II Samuel 7 we are told that after King David had consolidated his power, built his palace in Jerusalem, and secured peace with his enemies he felt guilty. Here he was living in this beautiful palace and the ark of God was sitting in a tent. Remember, the ark was a gold box with two angels on top. Inside the ark were the great emblems of Jewish history: the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and the rod of Aaron (Moses' brother). The ark was their most precious and powerful possession. It was the place where God came down to talk with Moses. It was always carried ahead of the procession of God's people. It had been stolen by their enemies from time to time, and it always caused the thieves problems. In one case, everyone in the city that was holding the stolen ark came down with crippling hemorrhoids. I'm not making that up! God struck the ark-thieves with a hemmie epidemic!

Anyhow, David felt guilty because the ark of the Lord was still sitting in a crummy tent somewhere while he was enjoying the luxury of his beautiful palace. So he made plans to build a temple in which to house the ark. It would be the center of Jewish worship worthy of the one true God of the universe. His plans were intricate—down to the size and design of every gold dish and vessel to be used in the temple—and he committed his entire wealth to this project. This temple—this house worthy of Yahweh—was David's great hope. It would be his finest, God-honoring accomplishment... his legacy.

That's what this psalm recalls. <sup>2</sup> David *"swore an oath to the Lord and made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob. 'I will not enter my house or go to my bed—I will allow no sleep to my eyes, no slumber to my eyelids, till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob.'"* David could imagine what it would be like when the temple was built and people would begin streaming into it to worship God, singing along the way. That's what verse 6 is talking about: *"We heard it in Ephrathah, we came upon it in the field of Jaar. 'Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool—arise, O Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy!"*

Not a single stone had yet been laid, but David could envision it all! A glorious temple built on Mt. Zion, pilgrims streaming from near and far, songs of joy filling

the air as they came to worship Yahweh. True, the grandest temple that they might build would be nothing better than a footstool for God. But still, even to worship at the Almighty's feet! That would be plenty cool.

This was David's hope... his longing. It would be an enduring reminder long after he was dead of how much David loved God who had been so faithful to him. Only one little problem... it never happened. God didn't want David to build him a temple; David had shed too much blood. The temple would be built, but it would be built by David's son Solomon. David would never live to see his hope fulfilled.

Earlier, we lit the Advent candle of hope. In this season of waiting and watching, we are hopeful that God is going to show up; hopeful that the Messiah will make an appearance. But for many people, Advent and Christmas are painful times precisely because they do not have hope. I spoke with a man this week who is struggling to find work. His kids won't have much of a Christmas. He said, "I am hopeless." Do you hear the depth of pain in that? I spoke to a woman this week; I'll call her Jane. Jane and her husband are struggling with infertility. She teared up as she shared with me how difficult it is to maintain hope that they will ever have children of their own.

Again and again these last weeks I have encountered folks dealing with hopelessness. And since David is lifted up in this psalm as one who continued to live faithfully before the Lord even though the greatest hope of his life was squelched, I thought we could look to him to discover how we might deal with disappointment... with unfulfilled hope.

So, how do we? First, we **try**. If we have a passion in our hearts—hopes that we long to see fulfilled—we do what is within our power to accomplish these dreams. David, who assumed that the temple was God's will, did all he could to make it happen. He dreamed of what it would look like. He had plans drawn up. He accumulated the wealth necessary to build it. He even bought the land upon which the temple would sit. David did everything he could to accomplish his great hope. He tried.

Of course, just because he tried didn't mean that his hope would be realized. David got ahead of himself. As we see in the psalm, he over-promised. He said, "I'll never go to bed—never sleep, never even take a catnap—until I build a temple for the Lord." And then the Lord said, "Uh, David... you'd better reconsider because you aren't going to build that temple. So, have a cup of warm milk and go to bed." We can be critical of David for overreaching, but if we are sitting safely in our life of status quo—if we aren't so excited about anything for the sake of God's kingdom that we lose sleep over it, if there is no hope for which we pray and long that gets us fired up and passionate—are we really in a better place than David was? If you think God has placed a hope within your heart, do your best to fulfill that hope! Work at it! **Try!**

My friend is still filling out job applications... still going to interviews. It gets harder and harder, but he is still trying. Jane is doing all the doctor says to heighten the chance that they will get pregnant. It is laborious, time-consuming and disruptive to the pattern of their lives, but this is their hope. So, they try.

I have worked with consultants who don't like the word, "try." They think it isn't positive enough... isn't assertive enough. Apparently, they studied with Yoda, because that was Yoda's advice, too. You remember Yoda; the guru on Star Wars. Yoda told Luke Skywalker, "Do or do not; there is no try." But I disagree. I think "try" has a noble place in the economy of God. Because in the end, we do not believe that what we accomplish is mostly about our good ideas or our good efforts. We do not believe that our legacy will be something we cobble together. We believe that we are servants of God and that only when we are listening to God, living in obedience to God, working in the power of God can we accomplish what God wants us to accomplish.

Because the best that I can say in most instances is, "I think this is what God wants me to do or I discern that this might be his leading"... Often it is wise and humble for us to say, "I will try." If it is of the Lord, he will bring it to pass. If it is not of the Lord, he may not bring it to pass—or he may allow us to bring it to pass against his best wishes, which can be disastrous. Do you have a hope that you long to fulfill? If you sense it is of the Lord, then get to it. Do your best. Try.

But more importantly, trust... trust in God's faithfulness. Trust that God wants what is best for you and that all things work together towards that end. Trust that the hard thing you are enduring—the thing from which you hope to be delivered—God is using to build in you the character you will carry into eternity. Trust that God's hope is bigger and longer than your hope. Trust God.

Back to II Samuel 7... After David announced he was going to build the temple, Nathan the prophet heard a word from God. The Lord told him that David would not build the temple; that Solomon would take David's place on the throne and that he would build the temple.

When Nathan brought this disappointing news—the news that David's great hope of building a temple for God would go unrealized in his lifetime—do you know how he responded? Complete trust! It is an amazing prayer that is recorded. David told the Lord how grateful he was just to be his servant; how humbled he was that God would even talk with him; how excited he was that his Son would have the privilege of building a house for the Lord. In short, David trusted that when God vetoed his great hope, there was a greater purpose in it. Some way in which God's name would be glorified and David's faith strengthened. David trusted God even when the evidence pointed to the contrary.

And here's why I am sure that this psalm teaches us to trust God for our hope. Because at the time the Jews added this psalm to the Bible, they were in exile in

Babylon! Solomon's beautiful temple had been destroyed. Israel's king had been dethroned. Everything this psalm celebrated at the time—the temple, a son of David on the throne—was gone! The Jewish way of life was gone with no evidence that it would ever return. And yet, while they were in exile and compiling a collection of their favorite psalms, they included this ancient song of hope—Psalm 132—because they trusted God. They believed that, with evidence to the contrary, God would still make good on his promises.

When your hope is fading, when all evidence points to the contrary, when you've tried your hardest and gotten nothing for it—trust God! Trust God! I asked Jane if she was able to see the hand of God in the midst of their infertility. She said, "Oh yes. Every time I hear the stories of infertile women in the scriptures—of Sarah and Hannah and Elizabeth—it resonates with me! And when I read the passages where God speaks of adopting us as his children, it speaks to a deeper place of desire in me."

The key to David's trust was this: as much as he hoped to build God a temple, his greater hope was in the Lord. Not in what the Lord was doing but in the Lord himself—His character, His love, His faithfulness, His provision. David trusted that if God was not going to fulfill his great hope, then God must have something greater still that he intended to do... and he did. I'm not just talking about Solomon's temple, which was a masterpiece... I'm talking about David's greatest legacy. What was that? ...an heir who would sit on his throne forever. Did you hear that promise in the psalm? *<sup>10</sup>For the sake of David your servant, do not reject your anointed one. The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne..."*

Do you know what the Hebrew word is for that phrase, "anointed one?" Messiah! Do you know what the Greek word is for Messiah? "Christ." David longed to build a temple in which to worship almighty God. But hundreds of years later, David's deepest longing was fulfilled in a way he couldn't have imagined when **the** anointed one, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ came to earth to be known, loved, followed and worshipped face to face—not in a building... face to face. *"We beheld his glory..."* David's descendant. Face to face.

One of the things this psalm teaches us is that hope is bigger than me and longer than this moment. We aren't accustomed to that, especially in our American culture. We like the advertisement for the credit card that says, "We take the waiting out of wanting." We don't want to wait for what we want, do we? We want it now. And God says, "No, this is a long game. I am preparing you for eternity. I want you to hope, not in a particular answer to a particular prayer, not in a particular longing of your heart—no, I want you to hope in me, trust in me, wait on me."

What are you hoping for right now? A child to return to the Lord... A cancer to disappear... A job to materialize... A baby to be born... A trial to be ended...

Depression to lift... Go ahead! Hope! And do your best; try your hardest. Give it your all. God honors that. But in the end, trust in the Lord... hope in the Lord. As the writer of Hebrews urges, <sup>23</sup>*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

## Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
  1. One of King David's great hopes was to build a temple fitting for the Lord. It never happened in his lifetime. What great hope are **you** still waiting for?
  2. What is the difference between "hope" and "wishful thinking"?
  3. Pastor Mark spoke of "legacy" vs. "immediacy". How are you fighting our culture's focus on immediacy?