

The Path to Hope **- Ron Stullenbarger -**

The Jewish believers were filled with the joy of hope when their Messiah rode into Jerusalem. I wish I had a video of the excited faces of the people who rejoiced over the arrival of Jesus, their Messiah. Is there any greater joy than the joy of hope fulfilled? But those same people lost hope a few days later. How do we renew our hope after we have been disappointed with God?

Our culture teaches us to work for what we want. We are taught to eat healthy and exercise so we can live a long life. We are taught to study certain subjects so that we can earn a good wage and live in comfort. We are taught to be kind so that we will be treated kindly. We are taught to place our hope in our choices because most of the time, our choices determine our consequences. Our hopes are frustrated, even dashed, when we are forced to accept the fact that this life doesn't offer guarantees. Or — maybe it does.

The people that lined the road on "*Palm Sunday*" had their hopes dashed on Friday. Some of them lost their hope completely, while others regained their hope on Sunday. This life does offer hope, if we are willing to receive the hope that God plans to give.

Peter is a key part of the resurrection story. His reactions in the Garden and after Jesus was captured are a picture of the despair resulting from his lost hopes and dreams. But Peter experienced the resurrected Christ and later wrote: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Peter 1:3).

Even though the early disciples were continually persecuted, those believers lived with calm assurance and great joy. The believers had learned that their hope was not in a better earthly life, but in the promise of a perfect eternal life. Our hope and joy has the same source. Our living hope, that cannot die, is found in our living Lord whose death guaranteed our eternity.

My living hope is in the fact that I am born again. My joy is the guarantee of my eternal life, not the circumstances of earthly life. I want to work hard, and I hope that my earthly life will be better because I do. But I know that this life does not offer eternal guarantees. Our eternal hope is in our living Lord.

Our world is full of people who have placed their hope in bank accounts, time on treadmills, and their own abilities to succeed. Chances are, you live together on the same street. Some of them may even go to church during the Easter season because they hope heaven is real. Many of them will simply hope for heaven because they don't know how to receive the guarantee.

The path to hope is lined with palm branches but guaranteed by the empty tomb. Who do you know that needs to be "*born again into our living hope*?" Who is walking the path of hope with you? Who needs to?

Jim Elliot wrote: "*Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me.*" That is a good prayer for all of us!