

**+ 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 + Where Did You Set Your Hope? +  
+ 18th Sunday after Pentecost + 27 September 2015 +**

"I just had them a few minutes ago. They were in my hand. They were just here! I talked to you and then I went out to the car. Then I realized that they were gone. Do you know where I put my keys?" You've probably lost something before, but maybe it was your phone or a document or a stuffed animal or whatever. Every one of us has misplaced something—and you wonder where you could've possibly placed that missing item that's probably sitting in some odd place right under your nose.

It happens at home and work and school. Even here at church it's happened quite often during the course of our building project. So much has been moved here and there, back and forth or placed here or there and then moved, that one of the most common conversations held around here has been "Do you know where that (fill in the blank) ended up?" God-willing, we'll soon be able to put things back where we can find them!

While missing keys and documents, hardware and stuffed animals are important for the moment, you can usually move on if you can't find them. You look for an alternative to use until you can find what you were missing or you even come up with a solution that works better than the item you had lost. Most times when you lose something it's not the end of your world.

Yet today the Apostle Paul challenges you and me to confront the loss of something that can have a crushing effect on your life, your spirit, even your eternity. The Apostle speaks of hope. Hope is more than just wishful thinking. It's not just hoping for good weather or for a good day at school or that you'll get chocolate syrup on your sundae. Hope is confidence. Hope is trusting that something will happen. Hope is looking ahead with the confidence that someone or something will come through.

As Christians, in good times, in times of obvious blessing, in times of success and joy, it's easy to know where—really "in whom"—you put your hope. Even kids know the answer. Ask one of the kids in the congregation and they'll tell you that you put your hope in Jesus. For a child of God through faith in Jesus, that should be a no-brainer, but the life of a Christian isn't always good times or obvious blessing or victory and joy.

No, the life of a Christian has its share of sadness and grief and anxiety. There are times when God's hand of blessing seems more like a clenched fist than a wide-open palm, and the blessings aren't so obvious. Earthly success is fleeting, and Jesus makes it clear that following him often takes place beneath a heavy, painful, ugly cross. As for joy? It seems to disappear when health or finances or work or school or a relationship isn't going so well. Soon your hope goes missing too. You just had it, yet with the latest turn of events, you wonder, **"Where did I set my hope?"**

Of all people, the Apostle Paul would seem like the type of guy who never lost hope. He was afraid of no one and what they thought of his teaching or appearance. He was willing to give up his life for the sake of Christ. He was willing to endure hardship and persecution. He was a seasoned missionary who proclaimed Christ zealously to often hostile crowds.

Yet even Paul could lose hope! You see, there were times when the Apostle faced tremendous pressure from his countrymen, from Gentile strangers, from governing authorities. He endured tremendous suffering for teaching Christ crucified, especially in the Roman province of Asia Minor—what we call Turkey today. Enemies of the good news of Jesus would follow him wherever he went to stir up opposition against Paul and the gracious Savior he proclaimed. In other cities, local businessmen whose businesses were idolatry or the occult stirred up riots or sought Paul's imprisonment. His life was threatened again and again, and he was attacked on every side.

You can imagine the tremendous pressure that Paul endured to stop teaching and preaching altogether, to stop disrupting civic life, or to stop proclaiming the free and full forgiveness of Christ. So it should be no surprise that there were times when even Paul's hope wavered. Paul writes, **"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life."** The hardships had nearly crushed Paul's hope. If they had, Satan would've won with the silencing of yet another of God's proclaimers, and countless souls would've remained in the dark ignorance of unbelief.

That burden of hardship quickly proved to be far beyond what Paul could endure or bear. He reached a point where he **"despaired even of life."** The situation seemed pretty hopeless and all Paul could do was wait for the death sentence he expected to be carried out. No human resources, no human strength, no human ingenuity could overcome it.

Yet before Paul lost all hope amidst all those hardships, before he could plunge into despair and be lost forever, the Lord reminded Paul where his hope could be found. ***“But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us....”*** Paul had lost hope that he would escape that ***“deadly peril.”*** He had practically pronounced the death sentence on himself, yet God rescued Paul in a wonderful way. In a sense, God gave Paul a new lease on life and a new opportunity to serve him.

The Lord opened Paul’s eyes so he could discover the hope he had in Christ once again. Rather than rely on himself, Paul relied on the One ***“who raises the dead.”*** The Lord in his grace had rescued Paul from deadly peril. Now Paul had the confidence to face more trials and hardships and difficulties. He knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that God would deliver him and would continue to deliver him no matter what Satan threw at him. Paul had rediscovered his hope in Christ and that hope was full of confidence in the Savior-God who always delivers and always comes through.

Hardship comes into your life and what happens to your hope? “I had it right here just a few days ago, but now it’s gone!” Guilt over shameful sins from your past plagues your heart and mind. How can you have hope in Christ when your memory of those sins won’t wipe clean? Your financial situation crushes you. How can you have hope in Christ when that burden is pushing your face into the dirt? You or a loved one faces serious and unexpected health issues. How can you have hope in Christ when your life or theirs is changing so drastically? Someone you love has hurt you badly. How can you have hope in Christ when you can’t trust those you love? Pressures from your job crush down with great frustration and exhaustion. How can you have hope in Christ when your job consumes you? Maybe you have depression or anxiety. How can you have hope in Christ when all seems so hopeless? Maybe I didn’t mention your hardship, but relying on yourself, you won’t find hope in times of hardship—only a burden that crushes you.

Yet you can rely on Christ! After all, he is the firstborn from the dead, the Raiser of the dead, the Victor who destroyed the power of Satan forever! Satan tries to rob you of your hope in Christ so you will lose it forever. He crushes you with pressure and guilt and anxiety. Yet as Christ did for Paul, the Lord does the same for you. He reminds you where you put your hope. ***“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us...”***

You find your hope in Christ Jesus, our living Lord. He has certainly rescued you with his own perfect life, his own innocent suffering and death, and his own resurrection from the dead. Do you have guilt? Jesus washes that guilt away with his own precious blood. Do you have trouble with your finances? While the Lord doesn’t promise to pay all your bills, he picks you up and takes the burden of worry off of you and puts it on his own shoulders. Do you have health issues? You have a Savior who is unchanging and has control over health and life and death. Do you hurt? Jesus heals you with his peace. Do you have issues with your job? Jesus provides contentment and satisfaction even in that situation. Do you have depression? The Lord provides encouragement and medical means to lift you up. Do you have hardship? Jesus bears that burden for you. In every case, Christ rescues you and blesses you and you need never doubt that or ever lose hope about it! You see, your hope is found in faith-filled confidence that relies solely on Jesus, who conquered death and rose again.

That hope that relies on Christ, who always comes through with his deliverance, eventually becomes thanksgiving. Not just your thanksgiving, but the thanksgiving of countless others. Paul writes, ***“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”***

Amidst all this talk about hope and deliverance and thanksgiving, Paul reveals a key ingredient—prayer. Paul asks his readers in Corinth to remember what the Lord had so graciously done for him and then to pray for him. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to realize that the Lord does hear and answer the prayers of his faithful people. Paul was confident that the Lord would do that because Christ had delivered him from death.

Is that how you approach prayer—with a heart of faith brimming over with confidence in your gracious Lord and his promises? With such confidence, do you climb up into the lap of your Savior to bring all your requests and concerns to his attention? Most of us would probably confess that we don’t.

Yet our God gives us reason for hope even in our prayers. He points us to the cross and shows us his wounds of love in pierced hands and feet to demonstrate that he always keeps his promises. That means you can pray confidently trusting that the Lord of grace will come through with the answer that is best for you. For whom

have you prayed—a loved one who needs Jesus, but won't listen to you? A difficult situation that has weighed heavily on your heart for a long time or just recently? A situation that seems almost hopeless? Your church as we finish this building project and begin the hard task of reaching out? No matter who or what is the subject of your prayer, you can be confident that not only does the Lord listen, but he also answers. You can be confident because Jesus delivered you and me from death.

Knowing that makes your hope in Christ pretty easy to find, doesn't it? You have a God who delivers and answers prayers, a God who gives you reason for hope and for thanksgiving. Clinging to his Word, you need never lose that hope in Christ because that hope comes from his deliverance and I pray that it will lead to great thanksgiving in you and many others! Amen.