

## **2CH Sunday at 7.30**

# Light at the beginning of the tunnel

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### **1. Introduction**

Some of those large billboards around our city are quite eye-catching!

I came across one recently advertising a major bank. In the slogan they described themselves as “The Light at the Beginning of the Tunnel”. It rather appealed to me ... a clever variation of the old saying about light at the end of the tunnel. It was clear that the bank saw itself as a financial institution that can save people a lot of worry by providing help and assistance at the first sign of a financial crisis.

It got me thinking: from a Christian point of view Jesus Christ is also the light at the beginning of the tunnel. We need not fumble our way through the darkness in the spiritual and emotional tunnels of life. He’s there right at the outset – an ever present source of strength, help and encouragement. He provides us with the resources we need to illuminate the pathway.

### **2nd Segment**

One of the ways Jesus illuminates the pathway in the tunnel experiences of life is through the provision of hope!

Now “hope-less” would have to be one of the saddest words in the English language. I have spoken to people over the years who can recall moments in their past when they were described as hopeless: “You’ll always be hopeless” has been said to them by a teacher, a sporting coach, even a parent. In some cases it’s people in their senior years who can remember the incident as though it were yesterday.

When a situation is described as “hopeless” it’s usually devastating for the people involved. When the doctor says there’s no hope; when the marriage counsellor says “I think it’s over” and when the liquidator indicates that the business is finished, the level of dejection and despondency on the part of those receiving the news can be crushing.

The word “hopeless” was redefined for many of us when we saw a young Australian woman sentenced to 20 years in an Asian prison on drugs charges – and the whole thing was seen on live television. I don’t know about you, but I had never seen the facial and emotional reactions of someone being given that sort of sentence. Irrespective of what we may think about that particular case, one couldn’t help but be affected by the feelings of hopelessness as that young woman contemplated her future.

But it’s amazing how some seemingly hopeless situations can have a positive outcome. Come with me back to January 9th 1997 when around the world yachtsman Tony Bullimore found himself standing on the ceiling of his capsized yacht in freezing conditions on a pitch dark night. Tony was deep in the Southern Ocean 1500 kilometres from shore and for him his predicament must have appeared to be hopeless. Most of us couldn’t cope with such conditions for more than a few hours but in the case of Tony Bullimore he was there for 5 days before being rescued by the Royal Australian Navy. It was nothing short of a miracle and a classic example someone being saved from a seemingly hopeless situation.

The Apostle Paul was shipwrecked on one occasion. He was also beaten – and imprisoned and run out of town. He talks about his experiences in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthian Church, Chapter 1 v.8: “The burdens laid upon us were so great and so heavy that we gave up all hope of staying alive”

But then comes the turning point. Two verses on, in v.10, he says:

“From such terrible dangers of death God saved us and will save us; and we have placed our hope in Him, that He will save us again.”

Paul was gripped by an indestructible sense of hope – and that was a huge factor in his motivation for ministry, his zest for life and his unshakeable belief in the fact that no matter what happened to him He would prevail.

That was Paul, way back then. But what does our hope in Christ mean for us today? Well, the really good news is that it means virtually the same today as it has always meant. The fact is, the light of faith provides a level of hope and confidence in the future that can transform any situation or circumstance into something that brings glory and honour to God. When we have hope based on a strong belief that (ultimately) God will have the final word, we’re ready to cope with any challenge and handle any adversity.

### **3rd Segment**

Our hope in Christ enables us to see the invisible and feel the intangible. Our hope in Christ takes us beyond that which we can merely see and touch; it opens our eyes to see the good and beautiful things of life. One of the modern worship songs is entitled “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord”. What is meant by “the eyes of our heart”? I think its spiritual awareness ... the ability to appreciate the deeper things of life.

It’s one of the most powerful aspects of conversion when, on occasions, you see someone change from being a hardened, cynical, pessimistic (so-called) realist to someone with warmth, compassion, empathy, understanding and a servant heart.

In Ephesians 1:18, the writer says: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you ...”

When we are facing a crisis (large or small) we need the ability to respond to the feelings side of life... the emotional side... it’s one of the ways in which Jesus provides light at the beginning of the tunnel because we are able to respond openly and receptively to those who want to help us.

Something else about our hope in Christ: It enables us to believe the incredible and attempt the impossible.

Our hope in Christ is based fairly and squarely on the belief that someone has come back from death – and that one day we too will share in that resurrection power.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:19: “If our hope in Christ is good for this life only and no more, than we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world.”

Think back to the events of that first Easter – the disciples were confronted with the stark reality of our Lord’s resurrection. Everything they had previously believed or imaged about death was blown away – forever!

Now they were compelled to believe the incredible: Jesus was alive!

And motivated by the power of that incredible truth, they attempted the impossible. They went out and (literally) started to save the world. The Christian church was born when, on the day of Pentecost, around 100 of the faithful gathered in Jerusalem for a spectacular demonstration of God’s power resulting in thousands coming to faith.

From a human perspective, starting a massive revolutionary movement destined to change the course of history would have appeared impossible. After all, the 100 or so followers were a rather motley crew. But they were filled with the Holy Spirit and gripped by an unshakable hope. These things made all the difference and they were able to conquer their fear and take on the challenge that had been set for them.

When we face the dark tunnels of disappointment, uncertainty, betrayal, rejection – whatever it is, our hope for a better future is based on the fact that Jesus came back from what appeared to be certain defeat. Let that incredible truth lift your spirit today and renew your belief in the future – the future God has planned for you.

## 4th Segment

Jesus Christ is the light at the beginning of the tunnel. This light of hope that illuminates the pathway and enables us to see the invisible, feel the intangible – believe the incredible and attempt the impossible. It also enables us to face the unthinkable and achieve the unimaginable.

John Ortberg has written a book titled: “If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat”. In the book he cites a medical study in the US in which 122 men who’d suffered their first heart attack, were evaluated on their degree of hopefulness and optimism. Of the 25 most pessimistic men, 21 had died eight years later. Of the 25 most optimistic, only six had died.

In that study, loss of hope increased the odds of death by more than 300%! Loss of hope predicted death more accurately than any medical risk factor including blood pressure, the amount of damage to the heart and cholesterol levels.

Based on these findings, Ortberg concludes: “Hope not only motivates people to positive action – it actually has healing power”. And then he adds that it’s better to eat chocolate in hope than broccoli in despair!

People find the strength to face all kinds of adversity when they have hope in Jesus Christ.

Sunday April 8th 1945 was the last full day on earth for Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Two years earlier he had been arrested for his part in a conspiracy to assassinate Adolf Hitler. During his imprisonment he conducted services on a regular basis for his fellow prisoners. Commenting on the power and special meaning of these services, an English army officer was to write:

Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and always had profound gratitude for the mere fact that his was alive ... He was one of the very few persons I have ever meet for whom God was real and always near ... On Sunday April 8th 1945 Pastor Bonhoeffer conducted a little service of worship and spoke to us in a way that went right to our hearts. He found just the right words to express the spirit of our imprisonment and the thoughts and resolutions it had brought us. He had hardly ended his last prayer when the door opened and two civilians entered. They said “Prisoner Bonhoeffer come with us” that had only one meaning for all prisoners – the gallows. We said goodbye to him but as he left he took me aside and said: “This is the end: but for me it is the beginning of life”. The next day he was hanged in Flossenbug.” ... This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, words which could easily be applied to Bonhoeffer. They are found in his first letter to that church chapter 1 verse 3:

“We continually remember before our God and father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”

It reminds me of a quote from John Maxwell, the world famous author and speaker. He writes:

“When confronted with a difficult situation, a person with hope makes the best of it, even though they are getting the worst of it! Life can be like a grindstone. Whether it grinds us down or polishes us depends on what we are made of.”

Martin Luther King once said “we must accept finite disappointment but never lose in-finite hope.”

## Conclusion

Jesus Christ, the light at the beginning of the tunnel ... The One who illuminates the pathway as we trek through the dark, emotional tunnels that are inevitably part of our journey through life... the One who provides the light of hope, enabling us to:

See the invisible  
Feel the intangible  
Believe the incredible  
Attempt the impossible  
Face the unthinkable  
and  
Achieve the unimaginable!

May you have hope in Christ today and every day – whatever the challenge you may be facing.

In the first century, the Christians in Rome were really up against it, with the threat of persecution and even death, as a constant part of their lives. And toward the end of his letter to the Church in Rome, Paul offered this strong word of encouragement:

*“May God, the source of Hope fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in Him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit ... Amen.”*