

“Agents of Hope”

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Conversation Starter: *Have you ever found yourself in a crisis and there was someone who stepped up and helped you out? Whether it was a listening ear, advice, assistance- just something that helped change your perspective on circumstances touching you without necessarily changing the circumstances? It's as if in that moment a sense of hope redirects our gaze and peace touches what was once troubled heart. This message is a call for us as followers of Jesus to answer His call to be that “someone” who steps up and shares the hope found in Jesus. Will you be His Agent of Hope in such a time as this?*

Let's Dig In! “The Birth of Hope”

In the beginning the Bible says that He created all things *good*. When people were added and placed in a position to tend and love His creation, God declared that this- *THIS is Very Good*. Life was an expression of celebration. Then something happened. Humanity chose to disconnect from God and discovered that walking away from Him made things darker, harder and confusing. Things were not acting like they did when people were connected to God- the world changed. It was broken. Living in this change is where we find the birth of Suffering.

In **Romans 8:18-25** this guy named Paul, who was once an agent of suffering became an **agent of hope** because of Jesus. He writes that from the moment people chose to turn from God, each suffering touched everything. Not just people- even the actual world itself is growing under this weight of suffering. All that God is not we became. Instead of love we show hate, honesty is lost in our lies,

Paul also says that this suffering will not be our end.

Suffering is not the end of the story. It's a chapter that will have an end.

The problem is we try to pick the broken pieces up and put things back together on our own. Sometimes things hold together for a short time. But then life happens, and things fall apart- we've hurt ourselves and others. There must be a better way, right?

God brought us hope. He didn't walk away from us though we walked away from Him. He is going to fix things- put the broken pieces back together. And in the end- things will be even more beautiful than before. Really? How?!

It's kind of like **childbearing**. <- Say what?! Trust me; or at least stay with me on this thought.

But we must remember this piece- the hope God gives us *exists within the chapter of suffering*.

And this hope comes into people's lives through God's agents- *men and women* who are returning to and following God.

Time to Go Deeper! “*The First Agent of Hope*”

The first **Agent of Hope**- **God** Himself. After humanity turned away from God, we couldn't fix things ourselves. In Genesis 3:21 we find God giving them clothes to cover themselves (this after they tried to make clothes themselves out of leaves). See, along with all the new changes that are part of the story now, death is introduced. Some Animal's life ended to show us that the deepest cost of suffering we will all experience is death. As we are disconnected from God, so would we one day be disconnected from life. All of us share in this.

The clothes were a temporary covering showing how innocence is now gone; like a child who finally realizes the world can be very harsh. But then God **promised that a child** would come that would permanently resolve the problem; put the pieces together and restore all things were there is no longer a place for suffering.

From One to Many “*Agents of Hope becomes a Family Calling*”

God steps into a guy named *Abraham's* life and promises that through him and his children He (God) would bless the entire world. He became an **Agent of Hope**. In **Genesis 22:17-18** God establishes through family (Israel) this agency of Hope bearers that would share this promise to all the world.

Later in the story we find a man named *Moses* sent by God to be an **Agent of Hope**- to stand between this family who are slaves and a Pharaoh who seemed to hold all power-including Moses' life in his hand. Moses didn't want to go (read the dialogue in Exodus 3). *In the end Moses goes, God shows He is still God and this world will know restoration.* As He broke the chains that bound Israel, God would break the chains of suffering in this world. God then led these delivered children to a mountain where He showed them His heart- what walking with Him doing life with Him looks like.

Amidst all the rules or Law was a sacrifice that addressed the core issue in each of us- *sin*. All the turning away from God is packaged neatly in that one word. It is a Pandora's box of sorts that unleashes everything God is not in and through us out into the world. Still, this **Promised Child** had not come.

But life was now good for them. Then they chose to walk away from God. The light of hope was dimming in them and they looked no different than the rest of the suffering world. This isn't working out. So, God sends them as slaves again to a place called Babylon ruled by a corrupt king named Nebuchadnezzar. Israel's entire way of life was gone, and they were strangers in a world they did not understand.

God sent them an **Agent of Hope** named *Jeremiah* who encouraged them God was with them. Even though they brought this suffering upon themselves God is giving them hope and wants them to share it in Babylon (See **Jeremiah 29:5-8**). This led Israel not only to look above their

suffering to God with hope, this hope spread among Babylon to the king himself! (See **Daniel 4:1-3**) Still, the **Promised child** has not come.

It won't be easy. Even with all that was happening, life still hits us hard sometimes. Another incredible **Agent of Hope** I want to talk about is a woman named *Esther*. You would think Hope is a good thing, right? Not to those who haven't tasted what life with God is like. Sometimes people can be so trapped in sin, so invested and swallowed up with this broken world that they push back against what God is doing- like Pharaoh did.

This time a guy named Haman was burned by a Jew named Mordecia who refused to tell him how great a guy he was by bowing before him. As a result Haman wanted to see him and his people suffer. As the plot develops God was already at work in ways Haman did not see. The new wife to the great king Ahasuerus was a Jew named Esther.

Esther enjoyed a very secure life; untouched by the cares and concerns outside of palace life. But then her uncle Mordecia interrupts this with news of catastrophe urging her to do something about it. Esther is afraid but then her uncle encourages her to recognize her place and position we appointed by God for such a time as this! On the brink of great suffering, Esther stepped up and God worked deliverance through her for the people! (See **Esther 4:13-14**) Still, the **Promised Child** has not come.

At this point **Agents of Hope** pointed toward the **Promised Child**- this didn't always change their circumstances, but did change how they lived.

The child is Here “**Goodbye Suffering, right?**”

That's what many people think- both then and now. Jesus (come on- you knew it was Him!) Jesus was doing some really incredible things- He was restoring sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, making the lame walk and all sorts of things that were reversing the suffering touching the world. Even disease like leprosy which was a death sentence for people was healed by Jesus. At least on one occasion He raised someone from death to life again.

But it wasn't just what he did, but what he said too. He elevated women, welcomed and loved on children and taught that forgiveness, grace and mercy were always the heart of God. How did Jesus know this? Because he is God- who became a man in order to do life as we do, experiencing suffering. Yet he was different because he never turned from God. Jesus did not sin. Jesus showed us what happens when someone with restored with God- life comes back into them and overflows out of them into the rest of the world.

Jesus was not an Agent of Hope; Jesus is the object of Hope. He is what we see when we turn back to see God and follow Him! All that Jesus did- he sends his followers out into the world to do in declaration and power. This is called the Gospel- the good news. See **John 3:16**.

But, what about suffering?

Going back to **Paul**, another **Agent of Hope**, he wrote that this Gift is within us and we are jars of clay suffering and dying in this world. In fact, as we continue to live our bodies will depreciate, the world will still move in directions away from God bringing suffering- *but it is not the end of the story!* (Check out -> **2 Corinthians 4:1-18**)

The chapter of suffering will end while a new chapter without suffering begins!

Jesus said if we follow him, we are lights that serve as a beacon of hope for the world. Let our lights shine to show the world that God has not left and is still working towards the end of this chapter of suffering (**Matthew 5:14-16**)

We are to shine in a world that is suffering from war, disease, famine- as lights we remind them that suffering is not the whole story- *just a really, really long chapter.*

Read John 14:26-27. Here is the Truth. The more we keep our eyes on Jesus, following God through His Word and Spirit we will know Hope which may not change our circumstances but give us Peace as we go through them. Being an **Agent of Hope** today is telling people about this, showing people how this is lived out and inviting others to turn from circumstances to look toward God- and see Jesus.

Application Time (You knew this was coming)

So here we are. What does being an **Agent of Hope** look like for us right now in a quarantined environment?

Right now the doors to our building on Route 23 are closed. The church is not; our place to gather and worship (Celebrated are relationship with God like in the Garden). Jesus said to Go into all the world. (**Matthew 28:18-20**)

May we say Yes! to **God** and accept our present area of ministry like He did in the garden.

May we like **Abraham** say Yes! to God and lead our homes to shine the Hope of the Gospel in our areas of ministry.

May we like **Moses** say Yes! to God and be willing to stand in the gap between those suffering and those not in order to see deliverance, healing and restoration as God wills.

May we like **Jeremiah** say Yes! to God and shine the light of the Gospel even if we ourselves are suffering.

May we like **Esther** say Yes! to God and shine the light of the Gospel when the cost may hurt us financially, socially or even touch our health and well being.

May we like **Paul** say Yes! to God and endure all suffering knowing it's not the end of the story- just a chapter in the story.

And finally, may we, as Agents of Hope say Yes! to Jesus and live out the Gospel in word (Hope) and demonstration (Peace) as we love those around us in the love of God.