

Volume III: CAMPAIGN

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Postlude



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BECOMING MESSENGERS OF HOPE

How to Re-inspire the Church with the Supremacy of God's Son

During World War I, I'm told, the U.S. government unleashed throughout America a massive public speaking campaign known as *The Four-Minute Men*. In an 18-month period, in order to promote patriotism and commitment to the war effort, nearly 75,000 were recruited and trained to deliver four-minute talks at every opportunity. Their missions took them to sporting events, movie theaters or just standing on the sidewalks of major cities. In less than two years more than seven million speeches were delivered to an aggregate audience estimated to be 300 million. As a result intensified hope about the outcome of the war bathed America.

In much the same way, it's time to flood our churches with Christians alert to another kind of speaking assignment. Let's raise up a battalion of heralds — "Messengers of Hope" — determined to speak to Christians about the glory of Christ and the greatness of the Biblical promises based on His supremacy. In every kind of setting and at every opportunity these proclaimers must be ready to testify single-mindedly for their cause — like

“fanatics”, in the sense Mark Twain defined the term: “A fanatic is someone who won’t change his mind and won’t change the subject!”

More to the point, they should assume a role similar to John the Baptizer in his “campaign” down by the Jordan. John defined himself as just “*a voice*”, one standing inside a spiritual wilderness crying out to God’s people, “Prepare a way for the Lord”. He knew if they “cleared a path” by repentance and faith toward their coming Redeemer, “all flesh shall see the glory of God” (Isa. 40 and Luke 4). To encourage a people who were weary, discouraged, harassed and helpless, he proclaimed: “... the Kingdom of God is at hand”, adding “One more powerful than I will come ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”, leaving the crowds “waiting expectantly” (Lk. 3). Declaring his Message of Hope, John became a friend of both “bride” and Bridegroom (Jn. 2). His vision brought the two together. Then he stepped aside to give Jesus the preeminence in many hearts not only for his generation but for ours.

In our last chapter we concluded that a Campaign of Hope is our most strategic step for curing the crisis of supremacy. Following John’s example our initiative must call for repentance, we must confront head-on a collapse of commitment among the saints and re-establish a vision of Christ’s glorious greatness for those who claim His name. We must call for the re-conversion of God’s people back to Christ for ALL that He is. In the words of Dallas Willard, we must strive to “gain a fresh hearing for Christ” throughout the Church.

This chapter looks at the first of three major strategies for this campaign: becoming Messengers of Hope. In it we’ll discuss:

- **Why sharing a Message of Hope with the Church is such a powerful ministry.**
 - **What the chief characteristics are of every effective Messenger of Hope.**
 - **How the Bible is a “book of hope”, revealing Christ’s supremacy throughout.**
 - **How to employ a four-part strategy for spreading a Message of Hope.**
 - **What the ultimate measure of success is for any Messenger of Hope.**
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Messengers on a Mission

(Isaiah 40:1-11, 21-23, 27-31)

Larry King once asked Billy Graham what the most exciting part of his ministry might be. Was it speaking to millions? Being a best-selling author? Having the respect and love of leaders worldwide? Billy's instant response was this: "The most satisfying moment in my ministry comes when I know I have received a word from God and fully delivered it."

As we've explored throughout this *Joyful Manifesto*, there is a word from Heaven to believers everywhere. It speaks of joyous promises ratified by the reign of the Son of God. It calls the Church to celebrate the coronation of the Christ and to prepare for greater involvement in His eternal plan for the nations. Once this message gets inside a believer's heart, that person cannot keep quiet. He or she can be satisfied only by fully "delivering" it to other believers, spreading the vision inside the Church to build up the Body. In doing so Messengers of Hope become one of God's greatest tools for mobilizing His people to reach the nations.

As someone has said, only two things last forever: (1) the *promises* of God, and (2) the *people* for whom those promises were intended. Every Christian must accept as his or her first order of business, therefore, the task of getting God's promises more fully *into* God's people. Heralding to each other the glory of Christ solidifies and deepens our cooperation with the redemptive reign of Christ. As we noted in chapter 9, this effort can produce the prime impetus for new waves of revival, evangelism, social reform and missions.

Is there anyone who has more power and influence in the Church than a believer, or a coalition of believers, who can make other believers *feel the reality* of the supremacy of Christ and the unparalleled possibilities of His Kingdom? What greater contribution could any Christian make than to help fellow Christians deepen their delight over the reign of God's Son and thereby renew their desire to serve Him? This mission is especially significant when taken up by pastors and ministry leaders who already carry

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The greatest need in our churches is for men and women who can envision the better future God wills for His people; who will motivate people to action; who will create intelligent plans for positive change; and who will spearhead the implementation of those plans, for the enduring glory of God.

(DR. GEORGE BARNA)

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

My aim is to raise hopes by pointing the way to life without end. This is the life God promised long ago — and He doesn't break promises! And then when the time was right, He went public with His truth. I've been entrusted to proclaim this Message by order of our Savior, God Himself.

(TITUS 1 — THE MESSAGE)

primary responsibility for teaching God's Word in order to lead others into "the fullness of the stature of Christ" by helping them "grow up into Him who is the Head" (Eph. 4).

THINK WITH ME ...

How does Paul demonstrate the strategic mission of a "Messenger of Hope"?

Colossians 1:24-29, to which we've turned often in this manifesto, defines so well Paul's lifelong goal. He presents himself first of all as a commissioned proclaimer, not to unreached peoples but — and this is the specific application of the passage — to those *inside the* early

Church. Here's my paraphrase of what I hear Paul saying about himself through this text:

My commission is to help you Christians fully grasp God's message. This word is all about Christ Himself — the One I just described as having the supremacy in everything — the One who also dwells in your midst. He alone guarantees for you, forever, all the glorious promises God offers you. That's why I proclaim Christ in the marvelous ways I do, everywhere I go and in everything I write, including this epistle. In doing this, I labor with all the strength God gives me to bring you to a full understanding of who Christ really is, so you will live in a way consistent with His glory.

However, Paul wanted *all* of God's people to become "Messengers of Hope". He made this point to the Colossians in chapter 3 when he summoned them to a ministry like his. He actually employed the exact same words that he had first applied to himself: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you *teach* and *admonish* one another with all wisdom" (Col. 3). *Every* Christian was meant to be a Paul-like proclaimer of Christ to fellow believers.

In Ephesians 4 Paul outlines *key communication gifts* embedded in local congregations, each of which indicates Christ's active reign in Heaven. He writes: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the

heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people...." (vs. 10-12). Assigned by our exalted Head in order to build up His Body, all five gifts require the recipient to be a messenger, primarily *to the Church*.

In context even an "evangelist" may not mean, first of all, someone sent to win pagans to Jesus (though he or she can and should). The Greek word for "evangelist" may imply "good-news-ing" the *Christian* community by making sure *they* have a more comprehensive grasp of the Gospel of God's Son for their own lives. There's a strategic reason for casting Gospel vision inside the Church. Whenever believers are enthralled with the greatness of their Redeemer's finished work they will become, in turn, passionate about sharing Him with outsiders. They will want to proclaim Him to the unevangelized of their generation.

Let's take a closer look at what the work of sharing Christ *inside* the Church really means, starting with two key New Testament words for every messenger's work: *proclaim* and *witness*.

THINK WITH ME ...

What does it mean to be a *proclaimer* of Christ inside the Church?

In 1st century Rome, when a son was born to the emperor, a manifesto was published announcing the auspicious event. The document clarified implications of the birth for the future well-being of every citizen and the empire as a whole. Technically called a *proclamation*, the news was carried into public squares, announced for all to hear and then nailed up to be read afterwards. As they traveled from one community to the next, official messengers delivered the same proclamation time and time again. When related to more urgent matters Rome's proclamations were actually royal

QUOTABLE QUOTE

This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message.... Here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ. My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along.... All this is proceeding along lines planned all along by God and then executed in Christ Jesus.

(EPHESIANS 3 — THE MESSAGE)

decrees, such as: “Pay your tribute!” “Worship the Emperor!” “Prepare for war!” Once issued, citizens had no alternatives. Debate was suspended. Action was expected. The Sovereign had spoken, period.

The New Testament writers borrowed this dynamic word (“proclaim”) to describe the activity sometimes translated as “preaching”. We could say that in the Bible the Greek word “proclaim” meant: “We appeal for others to join

QUOTABLE QUOTE

One of the most fascinating of all the preacher’s tasks is to explore both the emptiness of fallen man and the fullness of Jesus Christ in order then to demonstrate how He can fill our emptiness, lighten our darkness, enrich our poverty and bring our human aspirations to fulfillment. To encounter Christ is to touch reality and experience transcendence.

(DR. JOHN R. STOTT)

the King in celebrating his good fortune. We publicize important news about Empire-shaking developments. We sound a note of triumphant outcomes just ahead.” In addition, every Gospel spokesman on behalf of Heaven defined appropriate responses to impending threats or unexpected blessings. Those with ears to hear were commanded to reorder plans and priorities around the goals of the Empire of the Son.

Doesn’t that sound like the kind of ministry that, if carried out intentionally *inside* the Church, could begin to cure a crisis of supremacy? The first priority of New Testament-style proclaimers is to sharpen, strengthen, deepen and intensify for believers the great news of who Christ is for them as King. Magnifying God’s Son to each other, we bank on the principle in Romans 10: “Faith comes by hearing, and what

must be heard is the message of Christ.” *We count on our Lord Jesus to be most fully at work where He is most fully proclaimed.* As disciples grow to appreciate greater dimensions of His lordship, He will reveal Himself increasingly to us in ways comparable to His person and power.

THINK WITH ME ...

What does it mean to be a *witness* to Christ inside the Church?

Drawing its meaning from the legal sphere the purpose of a “witness” in a court of law is to contribute toward a *verdict* from the hearers. At a trial a witness steps to the stand, raises her or his right hand and swears to “tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”. A witness is called upon to help a lawyer sway the decision of the jury by an honest recitation of firsthand observations. Witnesses do not call attention to themselves but

point to something far more important. Witnesses testify to what they have seen and heard, as Peter and John claimed to do before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4).

As Messengers of Hope we should bear witness first of all to other Christians, eventually inviting them to render fresh a *verdict* about the supremacy of Christ: Is He *really* who He claims to be? Is He *all* that He claims to be?

In this analogy a witness is never asked to play the role of an attorney. A witness is not *pleading* a case for Christ's supremacy with their hearers. That's the role of the Holy Spirit, and He advocates well (Jn. 16). The "courtroom" (the Body of Christ) should sense, however, that the witness wants to *influence* the jury (his fellow believers) with his or her Message of Hope. The witness is intent on persuading them to "rule in favor of" the truth about who Christ is as the Son

of God, where He leads in the Purposes of God, how He imparts the Resources of God and what He receives from the People of God (the four components of our original definition of supremacy). Our first job as witnesses remains persuasion by life and lip, leading believers to exalt in God's Son for *all* that He is. The contemporary collapse of Christology in our churches requires this.

The Church also must witness to unbelievers by word and deed in our neighborhoods as well as among unreached peoples throughout the nations. In no way do I depreciate the critical need for many more evangelistic outreaches everywhere. But our top priority is clear: In compelling ways we must bear witness to Christ to each other as believers. We must challenge one another to live out the fuller implications of His supremacy day by day. God's Word is our portfolio. It can stir up holy expectations toward Jesus that transform all areas of discipleship and evangelism.

Otherwise, considering the significant loss of Christ-inspired hope and passion in the Church (as we saw in *Volume II*), I ask you: How else will a revived spirit of evangelism surface among us? Where else will the hundreds of thousands of new missionaries come from, so urgently needed at this moment to complete the Great Commission?

QUOTABLE QUOTE

You need neither fear their threats nor worry about them; simply concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ in your hearts. Be ready at any time to give a quiet and reverent answer to any man who wants a reason for the hope that you have within you.

(1 PETER 3 — PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

This was Jesus' game-plan in Acts 1. Providing His disciples with convincing proofs of the Resurrection, Jesus stayed on after Easter for an additional *forty days*! Why that long? After three years of disciple-making what was still missing in His ministry to them? What could possibly require so much additional input? A study of Luke 24 and Acts 1 strongly suggests He stayed behind to better prepare His disciples to be Messengers of Hope. According to Acts 1 He did so by exposing them to unexplored dimensions of His Kingdom purposes. He spent time convincing them that now that He had prevailed as sole conqueror of death for the entire universe, His very person was the "linchpin" of that Kingdom. Prior to this season with Him in post-Easter dramas, how could they have grasped such awesome truths?

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Unrolling the scroll He found the place where it was written, "God's spirit is on me. He has chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce 'This is God's year to act!' ... Then He started in, 'You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true, just now, in this place.' "

(LUKE 4 — THE MESSAGE)

Finally, Jesus concluded His 40-day tutorial by commissioning them to be witnesses of all they had seen of the vastness of His victories. "Witness" wasn't what they were to *do*. "Witness" was what they had *already become* by dwelling in His presence and beholding His risen glory.

Ten days after His Ascension the disciples rose up to speak about Him with a level of boldness never seen in them before. They testified to His coronation at the Father's right hand. They broadcast promises guaranteed by His position on the Throne. But notice — their ministry began in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea, moving on to Samaria. Only then were they to go to the ends of the earth — to unreached peoples. In other words, *their first assignment was to testify to the people of God*, many of whom gathered at Pentecost to hear them.

The emerging 1st century church maintained the pattern of Acts 1. Throughout the rest of the book, planting and growing a Message of Hope always began with insiders first. It focused on those who regarded themselves as the Chosen of God so that *they* might discover the new life that God's Kingdom (and King) offered His people. In turn *they* could become a blessing to the families of the earth. (See the conclusion of Peter's sermon to insiders in Acts 3.) As Paul put it, the witness was always "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1) — to the insider first.

There's no less of a need for this kind of consistent witness inside the Church to the people of God today.

If we are serious about a reformation of Christology, we must recommit to the diligent practice of being Messengers of Hope *to each other*, starting with our gatherings every Sunday morning. We must aim also to get Christ back into the conversation at the dinner table with our families as well as in everyday exchanges with Christian friends.

THINK WITH ME ...

What topics are people talking about these days in your congregation?

Is this witness — from Christian to Christian — actually happening in our churches? If it isn't happening there, can we honestly expect it to grow among the pagans? To get at the answer try the experiment suggested in chapter 1: Next Sunday morning listen to the conversations that go on in your church. Stand in the narthex outside your sanctuary, or linger in the fellowship hall where people enjoy coffee between services. What do you hear them talking about? Reflect on what church members discuss in the course of a Sunday school class or at a weekly home Bible study group you attend. In all such cases, ask yourself:

- How often do I even hear the name of Jesus mentioned in these conversations?
- When (or if) I do hear His name, do Christians speak of Him to each other with words that expand their hearers' vision about who He really is? Does their "witness" to each other magnify some dimension of His supremacy for others to delight in? Are the Christians in my church seeking to persuade each other to exercise greater hope in God's promises, in light of all Jesus is?

Chances are you will come away disappointed over what you find. In many churches members make meager efforts to serve each other as Messengers of Hope. While leading numerous pastoral seminars I've heard from leaders how very few believers are acting as witnesses unto Christ and His glory *inside* our congregations. There are few attempts on any significant level to help each other lay hold of greater expectations toward God's Son and then live accordingly.

Now consider this: If we fail out of ignorance, indifference or self-consciousness to speak about the great glories of our Lord Jesus Christ

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Hope appears to be in short supply; discouragement reigns. But God's people are supposed to be people of hope. The church's world mission is supposed to be energized by hope. How we need Christians like Simeon (Luke 2) to stand up today in our churches. This is the time for people of hope to make a difference, to dispel discouragement and darkness ... (to) see God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. If our worldwide mission means anything, it means we must be ministers of hope to despairing people.

(JAMES REAPSOME)

among ourselves as Christians, *why should we be surprised so few of us ever dare to speak about Him to the unbelievers around us?* We've had so little practice doing it with each other! Little effort has been made inside our churches to proclaim Jesus' majesty in order to increase a vision for His preeminence among ourselves.

We need not despair, however. At this very hour Messengers of Hope are rising up everywhere to meet the challenge. Each place I visit I find Christ-proclaimers emerging inside all kinds of congregations and Christian ministries. These witnesses are key both to revival in the Body of Christ as well as to a worldwide acceleration of the Gospel of Christ. *Is it possible that you are among them?* How would you know for sure? To start with, you might like to re-read *Interlude I* and see how well it reflects what God doing in your own heart. Beyond that, let's examine what a Messenger of Hope usually looks like.

Describing a Messenger of Hope

(Isaiah 61)

In truth, every person is already a messenger of some kind, to some people, somewhere, about something. This is simply unavoidable — even more so for Christians. Two fundamental questions need to be asked, therefore:

- What *type* of messenger am I?
- And what will be my *message*?

The second question — about the message itself — is what *Volume I* tackled. So let me address the first question here. After years of traversing

the diversity of the Body of Christ — denominational, ethnic, cultural — I have pinpointed **thirteen characteristics** evident in almost every Christ-proclaimer I've met. No single messenger may exhibit all thirteen at any one time. But most effective messengers in Scripture, as well as many from Church history, displayed most of them. Numerous 21st century Christians bear the very same marks. Such marks can be reproduced in any believer by the power of the Spirit. Here's a quick survey of all thirteen.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Preach Christ, always and everywhere. He is the whole Gospel. His person, His offices and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme.

(CHARLES SPURGEON)

THINK WITH ME ...

Which of these 13 characteristics are already found in your life?

A Messenger of Hope tends to be:

- **SINGLE-MINDED** ... Messengers of Hope determine to make Christ and His supremacy their primary message. They accommodate and shape their service to Christ around their message rather than the other way around. For them Christ is truly *all*.
- **VISIONARY** ... Messengers of Hope look at everything through the “lens” of thousands of Biblical promises summed up in Him in order to help Christians interpret every facet of life from the perspective of Christ’s all-encompassing dominion. These messengers encourage the Church to see everything about Christ and His Kingdom from the vantage point of the Ascension (what this manifesto calls “superspective”).
- **CONSISTENT** ... Walking out practical lifestyles of hope-filledness, Messengers of Hope give Christ a daily obedience compatible with their identity and destiny in Him. At all times they work at pursuing a hope and passion toward Him for ALL that He is, and then they turn the life-experiences this produces into the vision to be shared with others.
- **PRAYERFUL** ... They “seek” before they “speak”. Interceding for measurable demonstrations of God’s promises in Jesus, they seek Him not only for church renewal and missionary advance but also for the Consummation itself. Messengers of Hope pray, too, that

their Messages of Hope will help re-convert believers back to Christ and His supremacy. They seek to gather others to pray with them in the same directions.

- **COMPASSIONATE** ... Hope-givers and Christ-givers are also *care-givers* sent to Christians in the grip of despair and disillusionment to minister a fresh vision of Jesus' glory through word and deed. Sacrificing time and energy, they do so with patience and gentleness. Messengers of Hope are motivated by mercy toward "prisoners of waterless pits" (Zech. 9). Sensitive to the heartbreaks and disappointments of fellow believers, messengers know this is due, more often than not, to a crisis of supremacy in their lives. They gently restore hurting believers to a Biblical Christology to help them recover all the hope they are meant to have.
- **REASONABLE** ... Giving adequate justification for fresh hope toward Christ, they help disciples become "prisoners of hope" (Zech. 9) captivated with the greatness of Christ and His Kingdom purposes. By providing Biblical rationales for living with abounding hope in God, Messengers of Hope seek to convince their hearers to make Christ their "all in all" (Col. 3). They accomplish this by: firing Christians' imaginations about victories ahead; challenging them to envision God's promises fulfilled; telling them stories of previous advances of Christ's Kingdom; and stirring up holy expectations toward God's Son for their own lives.
- **HUMBLE** ... Christ-proclaimers have no desire to promote themselves. Their message is not about their own vision. It is all about God's vision for His Son. They refuse to take credit for the impact of their witness on other disciples. Readily they confess that even their own hearts of hope are a gift from God. Serving in a spirit of brokenness before the Lord, they desire to be Christ-proclaimers with "clean hands and a pure heart", depending on promises like Zephaniah 3:9: "Then will I purify the lips of the people that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder...."
- **FORETELLER** ... Joyfully alerting believers to issues of Kingdom hope, these messengers make the climax of God's purposes – with the grand culmination of Christ's global cause – a major factor in

how they help believers develop in discipleship. Urging Christians to recognize that the Consummation is always Christologically near (even as it may be chronologically near), they get them to begin right now praying and preparing for the End. Their Message of Hope keeps before the Church the truth that what Jesus will be Lord of ultimately, He is Lord of even now. At the same time, they challenge them to anticipate approximations of the ultimate dominion of Christ — substantial fulfillments and preliminary installments — by how He manifests His Everlasting Reign among them right now in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **FORTH-TELLER** ... They study and teach God’s Word for what it really is, a “book of hope”. They help disciples get a good grasp on the four dimensions of Christ’s supremacy: Focus, Fulfillment, Fullness, Fervency — and all the ways God’s Word applies those dimensions to life and mission for Christ. Like Philip with the Ethiopian (Acts 8), they employ promises and prophecies that speak of Jesus’ glories to arouse greater expectations in their hearers. At the same time, they summon believers to join them in promoting the reformation of Biblical Christology so desperately needed in this hour. As hope-filled witnesses they inspire others to confront the crisis of supremacy and speak out clearly about the full extent of Christ and His Kingdom.
- **DECISIVE** ... Exercising tough love, they challenge God’s people to face their own crises of supremacy, to confront their own deficiencies in vision of Jesus and His Kingdom, and to own-up to the shortfall of hope and passion toward Christ they experience every day. Messengers of Hope campaign for life-changing responses to their comprehensive message by encouraging the re-conversion of Christians back to Christ for *all* that He is. They appeal for verdicts. They urge their churches to be intentionally involved in His current reign by serving the advance of His cause among the nations.
- **MOBILIZER** ... Messengers of Hope are proactive. They call for, seek out and rally “Prisoners of Hope” to grow together; to deepen their Christology together; to sharpen their knowledge of the promises together; and to pray and take creative action together as agents of renewal. Their goal is the development of *Vanguards of*

Hope who can model what a community shaped by the glory of Jesus looks like, and who help confront and cure the crises of supremacy inside the Church. Messengers of Hope want to flood the Church with Campaigns of Hope.

- **EXPECTANT** ... Messengers of Hope are confident the ultimate outcome of their efforts to stir up “Prisoners of Hope” and galvanize “Vanguards of Hope” rests with God. They know He alone can re-convert His people back to His Son. They’re equally sure He will not fail to act somehow, someday. Filled with vibrant hope as big as the Kingdom, they persist as Christ-proclaimers even when results are not immediately apparent. They depend on the Holy Spirit to take their vision of Christ and His supremacy and plant it supernaturally in the hearts of fellow Christians. The Spirit empowers His messengers to persevere *in hope* until the awakening comes.
- **CO-PROCLAIMER** ... Throughout their mission messengers never lose sight of how Christ ultimately heralds hope by His Spirit through their faithful witness to His Kingdom. As the Father’s final Spokesman, even now Jesus sustains all reality by His powerful word (Heb. 1). Only His voice, by the Spirit, can penetrate hearts like a sharp sword (Rev. 1). Christ-proclaimers make their appeal on *His* behalf as if He were appealing through them (2 Cor. 5). Jesus joins them to preach the Kingdom not only to those “far away” but also to those who are “near” (Eph. 2), at times verifying their message with signs and wonders (Heb. 2). He actually preaches through them (2 Cor. 13), right in the midst of the congregation (Heb. 2), so that in every proclamation of God’s promises not one voice heard, but rather *two*.

How many of these characteristics do you find at the forefront of your service to Christ already? Where do you want to grow?

The Bible in the Hands of a Messenger of Hope

(1 Timothy 3:16-4:8)

Beyond question, every Messenger of Hope is a card-carrying communicator of God's Word. That is top priority. For this reason Christ-proclaimers aim to study and teach God's Word for all it is worth!

Of course, our Message of Hope will need to be personalized, designed in unique ways based on the scope of our *own* hope in the Master. But for all of us Scripture must remain the *source* of every vision we share. Although there are many effective methods of communication we can use (using music, visual images, humor and drama, lecture, dialog or PowerPoint), our fundamental gift to God's people is always the same: God's truth about the supremacy of His Son and the hope this inspires.

There's a tension here, however. On the one hand by keeping God's Word at the forefront we won't *incapacitate* fellow believers by promoting unrealistic expectations about the advance of the Kingdom, thus setting them up for unnecessary disappointments. Messengers of Hope must be careful to share God's promises in their proper Biblical context, for example. We must strive to keep bringing our hearers back to what the Son of God has *said*, what He has *done*, and above all who He *is*, by anchoring every promise of God in Him.

On the other hand we want to spread our Message of Hope in such a way that it encourages believers to open their eyes and *stretch* their outlook on Christ. We want to prod them to view Him as comprehensively as the Bible does. By feeding them a feast of Scripture promises, we want to enthrall them with larger dreams for serving the Kingdom. We want to help them gain and retain a horizon on the future that is nothing short of Christ's climactic Kingship, with everything this implies not only for later but also for now. This effort will demand a wholesale reordering of how most churches study the Bible — whether in preaching, or Sunday School, or Bible study classes, or one's own personal devotions.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

We ought to read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them. Whoever shall turn aside from this object, though he may weary himself throughout his whole life in learning, will never attain the knowledge of the truth: for what wisdom can we have without the wisdom of God?

(JOHN CALVIN)

Making such changes won't prove to be overly complicated, however, because practical approaches have been developed that can transform in exciting ways any Christian's ministry of God's Word to God's people. Let's look at some.

THINK WITH ME ...

How would you deliver to *Christians* God's Word on the supremacy of His Son?

QUOTABLE QUOTE

If we ever tell a particular Bible story without putting it into the overall main Bible story (about Christ), we actually change the meaning of the particular event for us. It becomes a moralistic exhortation to "try harder" rather than a call to live by faith in the work of Christ. There is, in the end, only two ways to read the Bible: *Is it basically about me or basically about Jesus?*

(DR. TIM KELLER)

It goes without saying, Christ-proclaimers talk about a *Person* above all. We rehearse the Bible's story not only of what He has done and is doing but, just as much, of what He is getting ready to do. Proclaiming Christ requires tracing back *every* topic we tackle back to the larger hope in Christ related to the Focus, Fulfillment, Fullness or Fervency of His supremacy. As Messengers of Hope we should gear our teaching to confront every form of *counterfeit* hope in a believer's life with God's promise. This can create exciting, fulfilling ministries of encouragement and renewal.

Let's assume you've been given an opportunity to take a few Christians through a small group study of a particular Scripture text. As a Messenger of Hope what would you do with the members? How would you help them study the Bible in such

a way that it becomes a "book of hope" for them? To get you started, here are *four approaches* found quite effective for unpacking the "Christology" of any passage. Any one of these sets of questions can help you plant in participants a more dynamic Biblical vision of the victorious Christ.

One of my "readers" who interacted with me on preliminary drafts of *Joyful Manifesto* is a busy wife and mother. By her own admission she does not consider herself a Bible scholar. Yet, without my asking her to do so she attempted to apply these four sets of questions to four separate passages of Scripture, just to see if they really made a difference for her. Enthusiastically she reported that each approach opened up God's Word for her in dynamic new ways. Maybe one of these "study guides" will do the same for you.

What do you think of the Bible study guide #1?

A SIMPLIFIED APPROACH

Choose a passage that articulates some hope or promise we have in Christ. Possibly start with a portion of Isaiah, or Ephesians, or Hebrews, or the Gospel of John. Or focus on one of the Messianic Psalms like Psalm 2, 24, 72 or 110. In any case, ask this set of questions about the text:

- What *promises* and *prospects* are contained in this passage?
- *What will be true* of those promises when they reach their *ultimate fulfillment* in the Consummation to come? What might the *display of their completion* look like *then*?
- What must I see God doing *here and now* for me to sense that these promises are being fulfilled in more immediate, *preliminary* ways? How might I experience *initial installments* or *foretastes* of each promise today? What might this look like, in specific terms, for me? For my church? For my city? For unreached peoples in the world?
- Whether in ultimate or preliminary forms, how will God's faithfulness to the promises presented in this passage *magnify Christ* even more? In other words, how does the hope it inspires zero in on *Him*? Why do Christians need to depend on Jesus to accomplish this hope fully?
- How might any of the previous answers help me *know Him better* in terms of His supremacy in my life or my world?
- What immediate *steps of obedience* do my discoveries require of me? How might this study impact my prayers, for example? Or my growth in Christ-likeness on the job? Or my priorities in financial spending? Or my ministry for Him to non-Christians?

Such questions can equip believers to study and share God's Word with refreshing insights. They can empower you in your mission as a Messenger of Hope! But you might want to come at it a second way.

What do you think of the Bible study guide #2?

USING SEVEN PREPOSITIONS

Here's an equally useful approach. Let's work with *seven prepositions* that capture seven dimensions of Christ's supremacy. The seven are: **to**, **for**,

through, before, over, within and **upon**. Seven little words, but they can help unpack even more of all we have in the person and work of Christ. They can help *reform* and *enlarge* our hope in Him. (These seven words are discussed in some detail in **Appendix VI.**)

To start your study choose a favorite text. Ask yourself or the group you are leading: How do the promises and prospects in this text expand on one or more of these seven key expressions of Christ's supremacy? (Here's how I've learned to formulate my study questions.)

- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **to** us?
(His nature and His character)
- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **for** us?
(from His incarnation to His crucifixion and resurrection, to His ascension, through His intercession, to His return)
- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **through** us?
(reaching out to the unreached world through us, either locally or beyond)
- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **before** us? (going ahead of us, opening doors, defeating enemies, leading us in victory)
- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **over** us?
(Head of the Church, Lord of the Nations, King of my life)
- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **within** us?
(reproducing His life within us, including His love, His holiness, His gifts for ministry)
- Is there an insight or promise about who Christ is **upon** us?
(as He intensifies and deepens all the other dimensions of His work with His people through the power of the Holy Spirit)
- Finally, surveying the text again, to what extent are the promises in this passage *individual* in nature? To what extent are they *corporate* in nature? ("me" vs. "us")
- How might all these insights on God's Son help restore in our lives much more of the hope in God were meant to have?

Can you imagine the extent of changes these discoveries will engender? With these questions you can help others re-examine God's Word in order to transform how they view and value His Son.

What do you think of the Bible study guide #3?

USING THE FOUR DIMENSIONS

Let's explore another way to turn any text into a Message of Hope. Return to our original definition of supremacy. The four dimensions of Christ's lordship begin with the letter "F" — *Focus, Fulfillment, Fullness, and Fervency*. As suggested earlier, all 7,000-plus promises of Scripture could be subsumed under one or more of these four categories. Thus, these dimensions should help uncover all the hope any passage was meant to give us:

- **Focus** relates to hundreds of passages where God promises to clarify our vision of Christ, helping us focus on Him better for who He really is **to** us and **for** us. We're looking for what we can find in the text about who Christ is as the Son of God, and how that relates to any hope the passage offers to believers.
- **Fulfillment** speaks to multiple promises that impact our ministry in the world. These passages point to all Christ wants to be **through** us and **before** us in order to fulfill God's mission among the nations, and to weave our lives and our churches into the consummation of all things in Him. We're looking for what we can find in the text about where Christ leads in the Purposes of God.
- **Fullness** describes the countless promises about what Christ intends to do within the life of His followers — how He intends to give us His fullness as He reigns **over** us and lives **within** us. We're looking for what we can find in the text about how Christ imparts the Resources of God to the people of God.
- **Fervency** captures those passages promising that Christ will come **upon** us to quicken in us hope, faith and love toward Him, and to intensify our devotion and obedience in serving His Kingdom glory. We're looking for what the text tells us about the glory, zeal and service Jesus expects to receive from the People of God because He is Lord of all.

Most texts, you'll find, major on only one or two of the themes of Focus, Fulfillment, Fullness and Fervency. As you grow in our understanding of what is involved in each dimension, a fresh outlook on any passage of Scripture will be established and will increase hope in Christ and passion for serving His Kingdom's advance.

What do you think of the Bible study guide #4?

A MORE EXHAUSTIVE APPROACH

Here's a more in-depth progression of questions you might like to try. This approach may prove the most useful in helping you prepare a Bible study or sermon. At the same time, it can also turn daily devotional times into powerful encounters with the Lord of Glory. You don't need to use all of them. Choose only those that appear most helpful at the moment.

- How does this text, either directly or indirectly, promise that God will manifest to us more of the *glory* of His Son? In what ways does it encourage us to expect fresh encounters with Christ for who He really is? (***focus***)
- How does this text speak, directly or indirectly, to the *mission thrust* of God's people? How might it reinforce for us God's intention to advance Christ's kingdom by working with His people to lead us into the consummation of all things? How does it unfold additional dimensions of the Grand Climax? How does it point us toward foretastes of that wonderful hope as we serve Christ's global cause right now? (***fulfillment***)
- How does this text, directly or indirectly, highlight God's promise to involve His people in a deeper, healthier, more abundant life in Christ? How does it speak to ways Christ wants to pour more of His victorious life into His Church and exercise more of His sovereign ministry within His Church? Or, within my own life? (***fullness***)
- How does this text point us toward the kinds of *responses* we need to make to Christ as our Lord — for example: How we need to seek His glory; or yield to His call; or pursue His agenda; or be passionate for His Kingdom; or give Him our heart's devotion and praise? Even more, in what ways does this passage provide disciples with compelling reasons for an all-consuming passion for Christ as our hope? In what specific ways does it call us to be more wholly committed to magnifying His name and to sacrificing for His global cause? (***fergency***)
- Are there any supporting texts with *similar promises* that might be woven into the prospects offered in this immediate text? How might

including other texts expand an understanding of the passage?
(understanding)

- What does this text teach us to expect from *God* as He acts on our behalf to accomplish any of these promises (whether focus, fulfillment, fullness, fervency)? **(grace)**
- In what ways might this text give us the right to expect God's intervention in *extraordinary* ways? If it does, what might that look like, based on the teachings in the passage? **(supernatural)**
- Does this text reveal any *hindrances* we must deal with, whether inside or outside the Church, which might prevent a fuller expression of the hope the text offers? **(barriers)**
- What does this passage teach us about important steps we should take immediately to *prepare*, individually or corporately, for greater manifestations of Christ's supremacy among us? **(preparation)**
- How do the promises of this passage help us anticipate what we will experience in the Consummation itself? In other words, how would the hope highlighted here find its *climactic* expression when Jesus comes again? What might that look like then? How might this text enlarge and enrich our hope in the supremacy of Christ?
(Consummation)
- How would a pursuit of the promises found in this text best express itself practically in our *daily discipleship*? Be as specific as you can.
(obedience)
- Drawing from this text, what is it about Christ and His supremacy that we should proclaim to our hearers? How would *you* present Him as the One who embodies and guarantees the promises of God? (This is related, of course, to focus, fullness, fulfillment, and fervency.) How can you increase others' understanding of Christ's glorious greatness as the center and circumference of the hope this text sets before all of us? **(witness)**
- Using the insights from this passage, how would you address any crises of hope or passion that others may be facing right now? With this text in mind how would you challenge your hearers to re-engage with Christ for *all* that He is? What next steps do they need to take to implement renewed commitment to His lordship? **(ministry)**

- If the fulfillment of the promises of this text were given fuller expression right now by the power of the Holy Spirit, how might that help make Christ seem more *supreme* for others? How might this contribute to curing the crisis of supremacy where you live? Bottom line: What kind of “reforming” of your current perspectives on God’s Son should this passage inspire? Where will you begin?
(campaign)

Opening up God’s Word to believers in order to impact their vision of Christ and restore their hope in Christ is just one part of our mission as Messengers of Hope — the most critical part, to be sure. But there’s more to the strategy if Messengers of Hope are to successfully accomplish their mission. I’ve boiled the rest down to four easy steps.

A Four-Part Strategy for Every Messenger of Hope

(Matthew 11:1-15, 25-30)

An amateur painter once tried to develop his own version of Leonardo daVinci’s “The Last Supper”. After giving it his best shot, he showed his efforts to a few friends. He was broken-hearted when one remarked: “My, what exquisite detail you have incorporated on the cups the disciples are holding!” Realizing he had failed to make Jesus the central focus of the painting as he intended from the outset, he destroyed the canvas and started all over again.

Messengers of Hope are like painters. Our mission is to pass along life-changing portraits of Jesus that make Him the major issue for other Christians. But how do we effectively deliver this message for maximum impact on God’s people? What are the key ingredients to ensure that every Message of Hope reaches its goal? Is there a tested-and-proven strategy that, combined with God’s Word, effectively awakens believers to reform their pursuit of Christ’s glory?

I’ve discussed this question at length in a previous book titled *Messengers of Hope: Becoming Agents of Revival for the 21st Century*

(available for free in digital format at my website). At this point let me distill from a number of those chapters a four-fold formula that comes out of nearly 30 years of being a Messenger of Hope myself. I base it on the acronym **H.O.P.E.** which stands for:

- **H** = *Hop On!* — a ministry of “inspiration”
- **O** = *Open Up!* — a ministry of “revelation”
- **P** = *Pray Back!* — a ministry of “intercession”
- **E** = *Enter Into!* — a ministry of “mobilization”

This four-part strategy provides a dynamic *delivery system* for any Message of Hope. Let’s survey each guideline briefly. (In my book *Messengers of Hope* I spent a whole chapter on each part.)

THINK WITH ME ...

***H* Is for *Hop On!* — How do you grow a ministry of *inspiration*?**

God cannot lead us on the basis of facts we do not have. That’s obvious. Ignorance cripples hopefulness. We need to expose God’s people to the ways He has been working (and still is) to execute His promises in power. How has He gone about manifesting greater displays of Christ’s Kingdom over the generations? How is He currently doing so among the nations? Since God is always on the move toward completing Christ’s global cause, we are obliged to help the saints “hop on” to His victorious “bandwagon”. We need to inspire them with the stories. We want to motivate them to join up with Him — to “get with the program”, so to speak.

Specifically you can expand a Christian’s vision using any of the following:

- *Recount signs and activities* of renewal and awakening in the Church in different parts of the world today. Give accounts of how Christ is restoring and mobilizing Christians and churches across the globe. A variety of websites can help you. So will a number of books listed in **Appendix III**.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Good preachers will look out over the wasteland of secular culture and say: “Behold your God!” Who else will paint for them the landscape of God’s grandeur? Who will remind them with tales of wonder that God has triumphed over every foe? Who will cry out above every crisis, “Your God reigns!”? If God is not supreme in our preaching, where in this world will people hear of the supremacy of God?

(DR. JOHN PIPER)

- *Report on breakthroughs* going on right now in the missionary cause among nations and unreached peoples. Give accounts of how Christ is manifesting His Kingdom authority in evangelism, social reform, compassion ministries and church planting. Again, use the web and *Appendix III*.
- *Comb back through the annals of Church history*. Uncover some of the hundreds of stories of people and movements who hoped in God and were not disappointed. Since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13), pass along concrete examples of how His supremacy was manifested in the past — with individuals, churches, nations — in order to encourage believers to expect Him to be able, willing and ready to do the same again. (See *Appendix III*)
- *Share stories of what God is doing locally* highlighting up-to-the-minute examples of “approximations of the Consummation” (see chapter 4) taking place right around you, maybe in another church or another part of your city.
- Of course, report on all the ways Christ is revealing His glory in various *spheres of concern within your own nation*, such as in government, business, education, media, and labor as well as in the challenges of our cities, or among the poor, or with immigrants. Certainly highlight every evidence that the Holy Spirit is turning back the crisis of supremacy inside our nation’s churches.
- *Share your own story* to show how Christ has displayed His dominion and power in your own walk with God. Tell your own story of life lived under the supremacy of God’s Son. Ask others in your congregation to do the same.

Whatever approach you take, the goal is to help God’s people “hop on” to His forcefully advancing kingdom (Matt. 11). We must awaken them to activities of the Spirit, past and present, that show how the reign of Christ can break into the present. Don’t let fellow Christians receive Scripture’s teachings in a vacuum. Challenge them to expect manifestations of Christ’s supremacy within their own settings not only in fulfillment of God’s words but also in a manner similar to how He actually works in other places, with other people, at other times, within other parts of His Body. As the Bible says, our God is no respecter of persons. What He has done for others, He is able, willing and ready to do for us.

Reports and stories, vividly and enthusiastically told, can accelerate the saints' hope in Christ and inspire them to "get up to speed" with where He's headed. Remember: Every hope-filled account you share gives the Holy Spirit something to work with in your hearers that He didn't have to work with before — to take them where they have never gone with Christ before. What a tremendous ministry this is for the Kingdom.

THINK WITH ME ...

O is for *Open Up* — How do you grow a ministry of revelation?

Once you have whetted people's appetites with stories of promises-in-action, then open up the Scriptures for them in wonderfully fresh ways. Show them how the Bible is the foundation for the hope your reports have offered them. On God's Word all of God's work is grounded. Therefore, by that Word all His previous Kingdom activities must be interpreted. Make use of the approaches explored earlier in this chapter — such as the seven themes (seven prepositions) or the four F's (Focus, Fulfillment, Fullness, Fervency).

However you approach it, confirm from Scripture how Christ is Sovereign over our hope. Make the Bible indispensable as God's "book of hope" for them.

Look at **Appendix V**. It lists scores of passages that powerfully portray the preeminence of Jesus and the hope we are meant to have in Him as a result. Share from these Scriptures every chance you get. This will help fellow Christians internalize a vision for God's Son and a passion for His Kingdom.

THINK WITH ME ...

P is for *Pray Back* — How do you grow a ministry of intercession?

Now you're ready to help your hearers pray your message back to God. Once people have grasped how much the Father longs to manifest the greatness of His Son among them in new ways — once you've inspired them through compelling stories and expanded understandings of the Biblical promises — the most appropriate step is to help them seek God about these matters. By

QUOTABLE QUOTE

From every text of Scripture there is a road to Christ. And my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, now, what is the road to Christ? I have never found a text that did not have a road to Christ in it.

(CHARLES SPURGEON)

prayer Christians can worship the glory of God “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4). By prayer they can petition Him to perform what He’s promised for the honor of His Son. All prayer is intended by God to secure further demonstrations of Christ’s lordship in heaven and earth.

Your role as a leader of prayer is critical to overall effectiveness as a Messenger of Hope. The blessing of seeking is equal in importance to the impact of speaking, when it comes to a Campaign of Hope (Acts 6). Beyond the amazing answers that result from Kingdom-driven praying, such activity brings significant changes in at least four areas:

- *It changes the way you share your Message of Hope.*
When you know your message will be followed by your hearers’ praying over the promises you presented to them and about your vision for the supremacy of God’s Son, you will be even more committed to giving your message in a comprehensive, compelling and crystal clear way.
- *It changes the way your hearers listen to you.*
If they know ahead of time that they will be asked to pray about the Message of Hope you share just as soon as you’ve laid it before them, their attention will be galvanized like never before on the vision you are saying and the hope you are urging.
- *It changes the way they obey your message.*
Praying God’s promises in Jesus back to Him always moves Kingdom-filled truths out of people’s heads, down into their hearts and ultimately out into their daily walk with Jesus. Prayer over supremacy issues takes discipleship beyond the academic and translates it into a passion for the hope Christ’s Kingship gives us.
- *Above all, it changes their encounter with Christ in His supremacy.*
God is unalterably committed to answering any prayers that allow Him to reveal His Son more fully to those who have sought Him in hope. Your Message of Hope will incite your people to pray probably in ways they have never dared to pray previously regarding Kingdom issues. God will take full advantage of this unique openness to His Son and will invade their lives to reveal more of His glory even as they pray. He also will do so later as their prayers are answered. Now they will see even more reasons to put their hope in the supremacy of Christ.

But, you may ask, how does one shape hope-filled, Christ-exalting prayer derived from a Biblical text? We'll study this more in chapter 12. There we look at prayer as basic to "anticipatory discipleship". For now, remember: Strong praying begins by having your hearers retrace by prayer major truths in your Message of Hope. For example, you might have your group or congregation borrow phrases found in a text you've just explored with them, restating Scripture with their own words and praying (or praising) those insights back to the Father. Or you might have them shape their requests by using points from your teaching or sermon notes. You can have them pray over the main entries on the outline of your study. Whatever approach you take, encourage them to express to God — in prayers of rejoicing, repenting, requesting, recommitment — their growing hope in God based on His Kingdom promises in Jesus. **Appendix VII** gives you a tool that combines the proclaiming and the praying in a unique way.

Our ultimate goal should be to create a "culture of prayer" in our churches, where "pray[ing] without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5) becomes a way of life for our people. This can provide an "atmosphere of expectation" conducive to hearing and receiving every Message of Hope shared with them.

THINK WITH ME ...

***E* is for *Enter Into* — How do you grow a ministry of mobilization?**

Prayer is not the final step, however. Once the hope has been proclaimed, illustrated and prayed back to God, our intention is to get our hearers involved in living out that hope.

The first priority is calling Christians to *prepare* for greater things to come, for the answers to their prayers. Just as the Bible exhorts us to get ready for the Second Coming of Christ, in the same way we should be poised for *preliminary out-workings* of that hope at any moment. Every Message of Hope should motivate disciples to pursue what I describe as "anticipatory discipleship". Here's a short definition: *Anticipatory discipleship defines the obedience to Christ that looks more to what is coming than to what has already been.* (This will be explored fully in chapter 12.)

We work to help our hearers interpret Biblical hope in a way that not only transforms their prayer lives but mobilizes every aspect of their *daily walk* with Christ around the fullest implications of His supremacy. They will learn to apply this hope to:

- Family-life activities
- Local church involvement
- Engagements in social reforms
- Issues of racial and denominational reconciliation
- Economic lifestyle choices
- Career directions
- Daily use of time
- Investments in entertainment and recreation
- Personal devotional life with God

Hope-filled Christians look for increased expressions of Christ's lordship in all these arenas. They must "*act as if*" great promises from a great Savior are about to find greater demonstrations. They must "*act as if*" the Father is ready at any moment, for the sake of His Son, to do unsearchable things which we have not yet experienced (Jer. 33). They must "*act as if*" the time for fresh demonstrations of Jesus' majesty are at hand (Mk. 1) as they daily "enter into" the reign of Christ and "enter into" the hope and passion His reign encourages them to have.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

We have preached ourselves, not Christ. We have preached too often so as to exalt ourselves instead of magnifying Christ, so as to draw men's eyes to ourselves instead of fixing them on Him and His Cross. Christ, in the sufferings of His first coming and the glory of His second, has not been the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, of all our sermons.

(HORATIUS BONAR)

Eventually this fourth step will require us to help others become Messengers of Hope. Just as it is often true that "leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders", even so ultimately *Messengers of Hope don't create listeners, they create more messengers*. Reproducing messengers who join you in your wonderful mission is a key confirmation that you've effectively delivered your message and that they've begun to "enter into" it.

H.O.P.E. — These steps are not gimmicks. They really work! Decades of ministry have taught me that each ingredient is incredibly potent, *especially when packaged together to unleash a Message of Hope*. Each provides an effective approach for proclaiming Christ's Kingdom, as we do so from four directions: by a

look back (hop on); a *look in* (open up); a *look up* (pray back); a *look out* (enter in). In using these ingredients you will become not only a more productive Christ-proclaimer, but you will also foster among fellow believers a lasting cure for the crisis of Christology.

Through it all, however, remember one thing: You *are* proclaiming. You're not simply giving counsel or advice, or expressing opinions. Your message is about a hope directly from Heaven, backed by every promise and purpose God has ever revealed in Jesus. It is shaped by the One Lord before whom everything must ultimately bow. So persevere in your mission. In love announce Christ's glory along with the wonderful hope that goes with it. Do so sensitively. Do so consistently. Do so with confidence your message will not return void (Isa. 5). Do so with believers and unbelievers alike. But do so first of all *inside* the Church.

Measuring the Success of any Messenger of Hope

(Acts 20: 17-35)

At this point you may be wondering: How can I know for sure I've truly been successful as a Messenger of Hope? Perhaps you're uncertain about the Bible study approach you've chosen. Or you feel a need for confidence that you've actually delivered your message and made a difference. Knowing a little about possible responses to your message might help.

THINK WITH ME ...

What four responses to a Message of Hope might you expect?

First, remember that even Jesus faced mixed reactions to His own Message of Hope. Only one of four responses (listed below) would be termed "*successful*". We must be prepared for similar diverse reactions.

In a parable about four different soils Jesus illustrated four possible responses to His "word of the Kingdom", a phrase highlighting His Kingship and its prospects (Mt. 13). I find it interesting that the first three soils make it clear that a "crisis of supremacy" already prevailed among God's people:

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

Just try coming alive, try living from your heart for the Sacred Romance and watch how the world responds. They will hate you for it and will do everything in their power to get you to fall back into the comfort of the way things were. Your passion will disrupt them, because it sides with their own heart which they've tried so hard to put away. If they can't convince you to live from the safer places they have chosen, they will try intimidation. If that fails, they'll try to kill you — if not literally, then at the level of your soul.

(DR. JOHN ELDREDGE)

- The **hard-hearted** people (trodden path) concluded there was really no hope from God to begin with. So they refused to respond at all. Satan, chief opponent to God's promises, quickly moved in to seal their doom as they received the message from Jesus.
- The **weak-hearted** people (rocky dirt) settled for superficial understandings of Christ's Kingdom-filled word. This created a response unable to withstand challenges that seemed to contradict the grand hope He offered.
- The **half-hearted** people (thorny ground) supplemented their feeble passion for Christ's glory with temporal strategies for self-fulfillment, such as the pursuit of earthly riches and fleshly pleasures. In the end, "false hopes" choked out the promised productivity of Christ's reign in their lives.
- Only with the **whole-hearted** people (fertile soil) did Jesus experience genuine success. Convinced God really had something

more for them — something better and greater for them in the Kingdom of His Son — they gratefully received Christ's "Message of Hope" for themselves. They held on to it, not wavering in unbelief. They ended up bearing the fruits of hope-filled obedience. Truly, theirs was a lasting hope.

Serving as Messengers of Hope today, you will find it prudent to be ready for similar outcomes. When fellow believers hear you, some will appear hard-hearted. Others will turn weak-hearted. Still others will respond with half-hearted measures. This will disappoint you deeply. But, by God's grace, some *will* choose to be *whole-hearted!* They will grab hold of your Message of Hope with great expectations and determine to live in the light of its Kingdom promises. As it was for Jesus, so it will be for you: Whole-hearted disciples must remain our primary audience — ministry #1 in any Campaign of Hope. Be on the look out for them.

Regarding the other three soils, however, let me encourage you: Before your message about Jesus' glorious greatness was shared with them, most were locked-up in "boxes" of shrunken vision, feeble faith and dead-end prospects. *Now*, at least, your message about the supremacy of Jesus has them wrestling with possibilities of a whole new kind of existence in Jesus. Now, you have them wondering if a truly fulfilling life, a life lived in the wide-open spaces of Jesus' forcefully advancing Kingdom, might possibly happen for *them*.

As is often said, once it is *moving*, a bike (the disciple) can be steered where it needs to go (the vision of Christ). Through your Message of Hope the Spirit has a new way to guide your hearers into sensitive encounters with the glory of God's Son. Who wouldn't want to help launch new dreams in the hearts of fellow believers, formed around Kingdom promises for the praise of the King, even if your efforts must take some "flack" at the outset due to others' struggles with unhealthy fascinations or unresolved fears?

On the day of Pentecost when good soil turned up among thousands (including not a few priests, we're told), then all of Jesus' sowing finally paid off. It cost Him His life, of course. It will be costly for every Messenger of Hope, one way or another. But we can be sure that a Word from God not only sustains the universe and raises the dead but can transform resistant hearts into "Prisoners of Hope" (as the next chapter will show).

THINK WITH ME ...

What is the single most important measure of any messenger's success?

In John Bunyan's epic allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress* we meet a little fellow dubbed "Hopeful". Part way through his journey, our hero Christian loses his first traveling companion Faithful to martyrdom (a rather soul-wrenching moment). However, he soon finds himself joined by Hopeful who for the remainder of Christian's adventures provides a constant commentary of encouragements. By his witness to him Hopeful helps Christian defeat Giant Despair, survive a dungeon, discover the Key of Promise, fight off corrupting creatures like Ignorance, Little-Faith and Flatterer. It is Hopeful who keeps the ultimate vision of The End alive for Christian. It is Hopeful who points him to the Shining One and his Celestial City. It is Hopeful who proclaims such a hope-filled message for Christian that the pilgrim is able to

progress (as Bunyan puts it) “from this world to that which is to come”. Hopeful’s mission is a thorough success.

All of us need at least one friend like Hopeful in our lives! More importantly, all of us need to become a Hopeful for someone else. Our churches need to be flooded with a *host* of Hopefuls! But how can we be certain we’ve successfully accomplished, like Christian’s companion, our calling to be “Hopefuls” (Messengers of Hope) for other believers? Is it simply enough to ask: “Was my message relevant to someone?” Or: “Was my message practical and useful for someone?” Or even: “Was my message encouraging to someone?”

Bunyan’s little Hopeful had far more in mind than these goals as he ministered to pilgrim Christian. Similarly, our primary evaluation must ask:

*Did my hearers encounter
a larger vision of Christ and His supremacy,
and were they gripped by stronger reasons
to put their hope more fully in Him,
than they had before we came together?*

Whatever the text, the context or the pretext; whatever the audience’s make-up, size or agenda; whatever a meeting’s immediate topic, issue, cause or concern may be, I must be confident that:

*To the best of my ability,
I have helped my hearers leave my presence
with a deeper understanding of the glory of Christ
and a fuller hope shaped by the supremacy of Christ.*

Do you recall the last time you raised spiritual issues with some of God’s people? Maybe it was during a luncheon Bible study at the office; or in a conversation with a friend between church services; or during deliberations at the last missions committee meeting. Maybe it was last night at family devotions; or while visiting a friend in the hospital; or when you recently consoled a grieving widow. Whatever the situation, did your effort focus primarily on *Christ*? Did it lead to greater hope in Him? Ask yourself:

- 1) The last time I shared God’s Word from my heart with other believers, did I unfold for them a *larger vision* of Christ and His supremacy than what they had before we met?

- 2) At the same time, did I lay out for them *more compelling reasons* to put their hope in Christ, and to do so with greater confidence, than what they had before we met?

For a Messenger of Hope saying “Yes” to such questions is the sign of success, as *God* measures success. We have succeeded anytime people can say, “*Through what you shared with me you opened up for me a larger vision of Christ’s grace and glory than I had ever seen before! And, now my hope in Him and my passion for Him are stronger than ever.*”

When God gives such a result, we’ve effectively achieved the one mission that really matters. We have taken a strategic step toward confronting and curing the crisis of supremacy. Our Campaign of Hope has found one more reason to press onward!

But being a Christ-proclaimer is only the start of the campaign. We must become successful on two other fronts as well. With those who respond to our Message of Hope our additional responsibility is to help *captivate* them as wholly as possible with a fuller vision of God’s Son. Hearers

of hope must eventually become *Prisoners* of Hope (see chapter 11) who ultimately draw together as *Vanguards* of Hope (see chapter 12) to become a dynamic force for the renewal of an entire congregation.

Let’s start by finding out how captives are created.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

If I could stand on this platform and say, “I have received from heaven a secret of wealth and success which God will give freely, through my hand, to everybody who will take it,” I am sure you would need a larger hall for the people who would come. But, dear friends, I show you in His Word a truth which is more precious, a great secret which is now disclosed to the saints. Paul went through the world just to tell it to those that were able to receive it. That simple secret is this: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” I feel I have only begun to learn how well it works.

(DR. A.B. SIMPSON)
