

Title slide 1**OUR FUTURE HOPE...****SCRIPTURE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-53 AND REVELATION 21:1-4****Slide 2 RUOK?**

Thursday was RUOK? Day, a national Conversation Movement that is equipping Australians with the skills and confidence to support those struggling with life. It is good to stop and reflect on how we are doing from time to time. It is great to have someone show that they genuinely care about your welfare by asking you this simple question... It is also important to check in with those people who are important to you whether they be work colleagues, family members, friends or whoever. We are living in unprecedented times and almost every day the situation changes. I'm sure this morning, if we each had the opportunity to speak about how we have been personally impacted by the evolving pandemic, even this past week, we would all have something unique to share...

Slide 3 Brighter future

There are many emotions as we look forward to the days ahead. As the weather warms up and we start to think about Christmas this brings its own set of challenges and uncertainty. We long to know what the future holds so we can plan for the holidays! We all want to hope for a brighter future and a light at the end of the tunnel. We can assume that Spring will be better and it is lovely to feel the warmer weather, but we keep being warned that for so many families Spring will bring tragedy. According to the modelling projecting case numbers and hospitalisations, I fear that the worst is yet to come. Even on Friday the Hills area police warned that we are a hair's breadth from going into lockdown in this LGA and the weekend is critical for keeping our local community transmission numbers low. I am confident that you, my FBBC church family are being sensible, but all this brings a measure of anxiety to our lives that is unfamiliar to us.

This brings us to the focus of this morning's message 'our future hope...' What can we hold on to with absolute certainty? When we are having an RUOK type conversation and we want to offer hope to one another, I want to be authentic & genuine. What is the real Christian hope that we can offer as an alternative to the political spin?

The focus of the message this morning is our future hope... As Christians we have so much more to hold on to than merely our dreams for a brighter day (as important and valuable as dreams can be) I hope you never give up on your dreams, I hope you have big dreams that sustain you and inspire you! I hope your dreams give you a sense of direction as you navigate your way through life and make decisions. But I'm not talking about dreams today.

The hope I want to talk about this morning is the hope that sustains us when all around us is pain, suffering, death and decay. Can we promise that better days will come with a 100% guarantee? When you are having the worst day of your life, when you are not OK and when everything around you is not OK. When we are at the very lowest point, when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death... when we are truly desperate. What hope can we cling onto when all other hope in this world is gone? There is a hope that is guaranteed to carry us through!

Slide 4 Titus 1:2

Titus 1:2 speaks of 'the hope of eternal life...

The great hope of the Christian, the future hope of which we can be assured is eternity with the Lord in the fullness of life.

In recent years we have become accustomed to the level of luxury and affluence that has led us to take our eyes off the prize towards which the Lord has called us heavenward...

Overlooking this great hope is nothing new. Even in days of the early church, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus:

Slide 5 Ephesians 1:18

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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

There is a grand and magnificent inheritance awaiting us.

Slide 6 Titus 3:7

This is central to the gospel message: *that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life.*

We do well to stop and remember that we are saved by grace, not by anything we deserve, not by our perseverance, our own effort, good intentions, positive thoughts, good vibrations or our thoughts and prayers but exclusively by the unmerited favour of Christ, in concert with the will of God; by which I mean that our salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ was in perfect harmony with God the Father's good and perfect will, that we would be saved from the corruption of this world. That is why Christ came to earth to die in our place, to show us the love of God and to purchase our salvation with his precious blood shed on the cross.

Slide 7 Titus 1:2

This plan of God, the marvellous plan of salvation, at the heart of the gospel, was not Plan B, God's rescue plan conceived in response to human sin... when God had to step in and do something because the human experiment as spiring out of control, and something be done to save the world from doom and construction. This is a mystery for sure... but somehow the hope of eternal life, was promised before the beginning of time.

This morning's message of our future hope is an essential part of the gospel. Matthew Henry highlights its importance in his famous commentary from the early 1700's.

To bring this knowledge and faith, (both the knowledge of salvation and knowledge of God) and faith in the promise of eternal life, is the great end of gospel ministry; that Christian teaching should have this chief aim, to bring about faith and confirm it in the hope of eternal life. This is the primary intent of the gospel, to produce hope as well as faith; to take our hearts and minds off the things of this world, and to raise them to heaven, to the things above. The Christian faith, leading to eternal life, gives hope and well-grounded expectation of the life to come; for God cannot lie, and he has promised it. It is great comfort to the believer, whose treasure is laid up in the faithful promises of God. A promise made before the world began. (Matthew Henry)

Slide 8 1 Peter 1:3

We therefore add our voices to Peter's acclamation:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

So we have an assurance of eternal life – that is foundational to the gospel, but is there more to this promise than the comfort that our life will go on even after death? Most funeral services in our society, regardless of the faith of the deceased or their family, will refer in some way to the vague notion of heaven and some sort of expectation that we will meet again with the dearly departed. As we listen to our politicians struggle to express their sympathy for the families of those dying of Covid, we might wonder about the specifics of our Christian hope and what more we can hold onto. What is the uniquely Christian assurance and hope?

This is where our bible reading comes into its own.

Slide 9 I Corinthians 15:51-52

52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (1 Corinthians 15)

This world will one day pass away 'since flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, this world will be transformed into imperishable, immortality. Clearly, this new creation will be better than we can imagine. It will be an experience of life that is so rich and deep and real that this physical world will be seen as hardly real at all. Eternal life is so foreign to our understanding – it simply is beyond our comprehension. As an engineering teacher, I am interested in the properties of natural materials. Think about fine quality leather or timber... surely to some extent the value of these materials is their limited service life. Like a beautiful flower, we don't expect natural materials to last forever. If we were to engineer a more long-lasting version of leather timber or a flower, the vinyl, Colourbond steel or a plastic flower would rightly be called artificial or fake. It goes without saying that these materials are a cheap imitation of the natural. In this world even the most beautiful things fade, decay and die and only artificial things endure like the plastic waste in our oceans. It really is beyond our comprehension to imagine a physical world where life is eternal and natural resources last forever in a way that does not encroach on us. And yet this is the promise of Scripture, this is our future hope, the inheritance that awaits us.

The second Scripture reading came from Revelation 21:1-4

This section is titled: A New Heaven and a New Earth in the NIV, but what is described is so much more.

Slide 10 Revelation 21:3

This new creation will be a place where we will know God's presence eternally. We will see the Lord face to face and enjoy him forever. We know that God is always with us but sometimes with all that is wrong with this world, in the midst of our pain, we can find ourselves asking, 'where are you God?' Sometimes when we pray, God can seem so far away. Sometimes it feels like he isn't with us at all. But it will not always be like this...

Now that we are confined to our homes and restricted to only meet in person with members of our household, it adds another dimension that God will live with us, 3 ... "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. The presence of God with us for all eternity is not merely virtual or spiritual reality. Sometimes when we read about our spiritual or heavenly bodies, we become concerned that heaven will be some spiritual imitation of our current experience of life, merely some shadowy reflection of our physical life in this world, as disembodied spirits floating around for all time. We do well to remember that Jesus appeared to his disciples in bodily form. He met with them, spoke with them and ate with them. He may not have had flesh and blood, but he had a physicality that was undeniable.

Slide 11 Revelation 21:4

Revelation 21 goes on to say

'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'. (Revelation 21:1-4)

This means that we will never be sick again! We currently live in a fallen, imperfect world. People get sick, suffer and die. In heaven that simply is not the way it will be. In addition to the utter joy of living in God's presence, will also be blessed with new heavenly bodies.

There will be no more death, mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. There will be no more disease or aches or pains. No more tablets to take, doctors to see or soreness to deal with. No more tests to be run. The doctors will be out of business.

The reality is that heaven is a place more wonderful than we can ever begin to imagine. It is a place of joy and beauty, of peace and happiness that will never end. Think about the implications of the promise that “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,” no arguments, no more misunderstandings, disagreements, and no more disappointments. We will enjoy fellowship without fear for all eternity.

I love to learn, and I particularly like to learn from those I respect...

Whenever we feel worn out and alone, we do well to remember that we will have eternity to be with those we love in the most intimate of friendship, Grandparents, Bible heroes, all those people whose Christian biographies we read will be there. And there will be no sense of urgency, no competing priorities, no rush to be somewhere else. You will have all the time in the world to hear their stories of faith and learn from them.

Whereas in this life we need to work hard at our mental health, our mindfulness, spiritual disciplines, and practices. I can only imagine a time when prayer and bible reading are not a chore that requires our diligence and perseverance but an absolute joy. It will be so good when all strivings cease, and we are finally at peace. Not dead and buried but alive in a way we have never known before and cannot even imagine!

Slide 12 Revelation 21:25

Both Revelation 21:25 and Revelation 22:5 declare that there will be no more night, from which I can only assume that we do not grow weary and tired, needing to sleep during the day because of interrupted sleep at night. The implications of this are amazing. We will:

- Work without exhaustion

- Learn without fatigue
- Rest without boredom How does that sound?
- I think it will be amazing simply having enough time to do everything we want...

Heaven is the place where God can eternally enjoy His loving relationship with us. He not only wants to have relationship with you for the however many years you have on this earth. He wants to be in relationship with you for all eternity. That's how much He loves you!

Slide 13 Colossians 1:3-5

Like I said at the outset, I think we have taken our eyes of this future hope somewhat. We have grown comfortable with our lives here on earth. This is not to criticise our success and good stewardship of the resources the Lord has given us, but just a reminder that when we are feeling anxious and concerned about the future, we ought to lift our eyes and look beyond the days ahead, beyond even the next 18 months to 2 years; we need to look beyond this world to the world to come. This is our future hope this is our birthright; this is our inheritance in the Lord. I'm sure all too often we simply take heaven for granted. It is kind of like an insurance policy that we know that we have tucked away somewhere, we are up-to-date with the payment, having given our hearts' to Jesus. We might assume that just like it would be a bit weird to study our insurance policies diligently, we assume that it is a bit weird to think about heaven too much, it's a bit depressing to be preoccupied with thoughts of heaven, right?

I suppose we prefer not to dwell on it, we keep it filed, just in case we ever need it. But we prefer to live our lives treating our belief in heaven just like our insurance policies, hoping that we will never need them.

At different times of my life the thought of heaven has been truly inspirational to me, but I confess more recently the assurance of our future hope of eternity with the Lord and the complete restoration of the physical world in the new heaven and new earth has become less significant for me. Instead of being something we would prefer not to think about, the challenge today is to take hold of this future hope and allow it to transform how we approach life. We see the potential for this in Colossians 1:3-6.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— 5 ... faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. (Colossians 1:3-6)

The wonder of our eternal destiny with the Lord is yet another dimension of God's grace given to us. Our future hope of everlasting life in heaven ought to be the well spring from which our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and our love for all God's people springs forth in abundance. Eternal life is not just something to get excited about when we first respond to the gospel, but something to reflect on to inspire us as we face the uncertainty of this present world with its difficulties, challenges, pain and suffering.

Benediction

May you be blessed by God's loving kindness in the days ahead

May you be carried by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

May he keep you and your family safe

May you be blessed with time outdoors and enjoy the sun

May you be able to exercise without too many aches and pains

May you eat well and establish good routines and structures to sustain you

May your life be full of the peace of God.

And May the joy of the Lord and our future hope be your strength. *Amen*