

The Promise

“Do not let your heart be troubled.”

—John 14:1

Ernest Shackleton was born in Ireland, the son of a doctor. Ernest was an avid reader and, as a result of that reading, developed a strong sense of adventure. While his father had high aspirations of his son becoming a doctor, Ernest had other ideas. His desire to explore led him to join the merchant navy and by the young age of twenty-four he became a master mariner. Shackleton desired to explore the poles of the earth, especially the South Pole. In 1902, Shackleton, along with fellow explorer Robert Falcon Scott set a record for going the furthest south and closest to the south pole. Shackleton went on several other explorations to the south, but the most famous is the Trans-Antarctic expedition of 1914. The goal was to transverse the Antarctic. The adventure required two crews, one to make the journey, the other to place the supplies for a successful journey. Shackleton set out on that fantastic journey in the ship, *Endurance*.

As the *Endurance* drew nearer and nearer to Antarctic, the ship was surrounded and eventually totally blocked in by ice. They hoped to weather the danger and wait it out until the spring thaw then continue their journey. However, the ice pressed in harder and harder on the *Endurance*

Hope for a Helpless Planet

until it eventually breached the hull. Shackleton and his crew were forced to abandon ship. The *Endurance* sank. For two months the party camped on ice floes hoping that they would drift toward Paulet Island. Paulet Island would provide refuge and safety along a commonly used shipping route. However those plans were dashed. The ice floe they were on began to break up and the party was forced into their lifeboats and they eventually found themselves on Elephant Island. Because it was remote and away from any shipping routes, Shackleton knew that if his crew stayed on Elephant Island, there would be no rescue and certain death. He knew that he needed to take a risk and do something out of the ordinary to save his men. He decided he would take five men with him and set sail for South Georgia Island in a small boat hoping to get the help they needed. Leaving twenty-two men behind, he left them with a promise that he would return to take them home. In a circumstance of complete hopelessness, Shackleton promised that he would return.

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Hopelessness. We live in a world that seems to offer very little in the way of hope. We look around the world today and see that it seems to be falling apart: wars and uprisings, unsolved hunger and famine, a teetering economy that could implode, and the general polarization of society. What is a person to do?

This hopelessness and despair reminds me of an event in the Bible when the apostle John shares the experience of the disciples just before Jesus was arrested and eventually killed. The disciples had just spent their last meal with Jesus.

He was trying to prepare them for all that was soon to take place. In John 13:31–35 it is recorded,

So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This teaching left His disciples confused, where was their master going? Why was He going to leave? Why couldn't they go with him? Then Peter, in his very aggressive style engaged Jesus further in verses 36–38, “Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, where are You going?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.’ ”

Can you imagine what a crushing blow this was for Peter to hear? Jesus was Peter's teacher, he had spent three and a half years with Him. He desired to be as close to Jesus as possible. He was a part of Jesus' inner circle and now Jesus told him that he would betray his beloved teacher. On that night when Jesus was trying to prepare them for the coming

Hope for a Helpless Planet

events, they were confused and didn't understand. What could Jesus do? He shared words of comfort; words that would bring security in the midst of uncertainty. Listen to Jesus, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (John 14:1-4).

Can you hear the loving voice of Jesus trying to bring comfort to Peter and the rest of the disciples? The disciples, who were distraught over Jesus' prediction of His death, and Peter, who was troubled by his predicted denial, are given hope. What is the hope that Jesus provides? Hope in the Second Coming. Hope that even though Jesus was going to leave them, He would come back for them. The second coming of Jesus is the hope of every person on this earth. The second coming of Jesus can be your hope today. Through all types of turmoil and through every challenge faced in life, the hope for this helpless planet is the return of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul had these words to say in Titus 2:11-14, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." Notice that Paul refers to the Second Coming as the blessed hope.

Why does the Second Coming give us hope?

Well, let's first ask, what is hope?

According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, *hope* is defined as "the feeling of wanting something to happen and thinking that it could happen."

Jesus wants to assure us that things will turn out for the best. How so?

John 3:16 contains that answer, a verse that is well known, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Whoever believes will have everlasting life, but reading the next verse brings even more hope and comfort. Continuing on to verse 17, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Notice that Jesus was sent to save the world not condemn it. Too often Christianity presents the idea that God is out there somewhere with a watchful eye, waiting for you to make the wrong move and then zap! He's got you. But no, Jesus hasn't come with the intention of condemning people, He did not come to destroy people. Jesus came to save you and He is coming again to take you home with Him.

Do you remember those words that Jesus spoke in John 14? "Let not your hearts be troubled." There may be great disappointment in your life; you may be facing unexpected challenges. Maybe you're fighting cancer, maybe you're going through a divorce or maybe life seems to be overwhelming you from all sides. Jesus draws near and says, "Let not your hearts be troubled" Why? Because Jesus says "you believe in God, believe also in Him." Then Jesus promises that in heaven there are many mansions or some of the modern versions of the Bible translate it rooms. The promise here is not based on materialistic riches but on proximity. *Proximity to Jesus*.

Hope for a Helpless Planet

Jesus promises that He has gone to heaven to prepare a place for you. Not just a general you, but for you personally. In fact, when you repeat the verse, why not use the word *me*. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for me and for you. That is where He lives, you may also live there. This was the whole purpose of Jesus' first coming. He would pave the way for us to be reunited with Him forever. But we all face a huge problem. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death" and then Romans 3:23 further emphasizes that problem, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This does not give us good prospects for the future. The wages of sin is death and all have sinned. Our destiny seems bleak. But you know, I didn't quote the latter part of Romans 6:23, it goes on to say, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is why Jesus is coming again, to give us the fulfillment of His promise of eternal life. This is why Jesus can say in John 14, "and if I go and prepare a place, I will come again." Do you hear those words? I will come again.

Now, let me share with you some insight on those words that bring an even greater depth of hope. As we read, "I will come again," we know that in the English language that phrase is in the future tense. However, in the original language it was not. As you may already know, the New Testament of the Bible was originally written in Greek. And in Greek, it is actually written in the present tense. You see, when John wrote these words he employed a grammatical technique called the futuristic present. What does that mean? An author would write something in the present tense but have a future meaning to convey that the event was so sure, was so definite, that it was to be written as if it was already happening or had happened. John lays out the

assurance that Jesus is coming again. And remember He is coming for you, He is coming for me—in fact He's prepared a place for you, He's prepared a place for me. What does this all mean?

Well friend, Jesus loves you so much that He wants to spend eternity with you, but the question is, do you want to spend eternity with Him? It's a choice He freely gives to you. But what will you decide? Jesus wants you there.

But today many people have discounted the words of the Bible. Some poke fun at this Book, and numerous people have discounted the promises of His second coming found throughout the Bible. But this shouldn't surprise us. Peter warned us almost two thousand years ago, in his second letter, in chapter three, verses three and four, "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.' " A scoffer is someone who ridicules things and doesn't believe. Peter warns that there will be people who will ridicule those who believe in the second coming of Jesus. They will say that the earth has always existed and it will continue to exist without any interruption. They will say, "Jesus isn't coming, you're silly to believe in such fairy tales."

But friends by just reading or listening to the news, we realize the turmoil of this earth. Paul wrote these words in Romans 8:20–22, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now." The

Hope for a Helpless Planet

whole earth itself was subject to the curse of sin and all the upheaval in the world we see is the earth groaning to be freed by the coming of Jesus. Everything happening around us points to Jesus' soon return. But wait, don't those scoffers have a point? After all, it has been two thousand years from the time when Jesus gave that promise. But notice again what Peter says in 2 Peter 3:8, 9, "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

For God, time is irrelevant. He is not confined by our rendering of time. But more importantly, the Bible says that Jesus isn't slack or relaxed concerning the promise of His return. But He is longsuffering. A very special word that conveys an extraordinary patience. Why has He been so patient and hasn't returned? Because He doesn't want any to perish, Jesus came to this earth so that no one had to die eternally and that all would come to repentance and be saved.

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Ernest Shackleton and his five men left Elephant Island for South Georgia.

Aware of the great difficulties they would face on their eighteen hundred nautical-mile journey, Shackleton packed only four weeks of supplies. He knew the crew wouldn't survive any longer than that. Through treacherous seas and a storm that produced winds strong enough to sink a five-hundred-ton ship, that crew finally made it to South Georgia Island. Once arriving on the shores of the island,

Shackleton and part of his crew still had to hike more than thirty miles to get to the whaling station—the only inhabited part of the island. After finally arriving at the whaling station, Shackleton gathered another crew for the rescue mission. Now came the most daunting task—returning to Elephant Island for that promised rescue. Four months after leaving Elephant Island, Shackleton returned to save his men. At times, some of those men may have wondered if he was really returning. They may have wondered if he would keep his promise. However, Shackleton's entire crew was saved. Even though they lost the ship *Endurance*, each one of them endured to the end. Shackleton delivered on his promise and he was proclaimed a hero.

Jesus has made a promise. He has promised that He is coming again. He is coming to take His children home. That home, which is pictured in Revelation 21:1–5,

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

Hope for a Helpless Planet

No more suffering, no more pain—all things new. Everything working the way that it was originally intended to be—perfect harmony, perfect peace. This is what Jesus wants for you and for me. It is what He promised. Today, do you want to ask Jesus into your heart and make a decision to follow Him fully? Jesus desires to take you home. He says these words as recorded in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” Jesus knocks today, will you let Him in?

The apostle Paul also gives us comfort and hope in describing the day Jesus returns in his first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter four, verses fifteen through eighteen,

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

We shall always be with the Lord. No wonder that we are to comfort one another with these words!

Whatever your situation may be, Jesus wants to encourage you—He wants to give you hope. Are you facing an illness? Jesus says, “Don’t let your heart be troubled.” Are you facing marital challenges? Jesus wants to give you assurance. Are you facing a problem in the work place? Jesus reaches out to encourage you. Whatever you face today, on this hopeless

and helpless planet Jesus gives you hope.

Today, I invite you to cling to the hope of Jesus' soon return. Today is your opportunity to invite Him into your heart and commit yourself to Him. Jesus invites you today, in His words in Matthew 11:28, 29, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."