

Hope & Encouragement for the hurting & harassed (6-28-2020)

2 Thes. 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, *17* encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word.

Actor John Krasinski saw people hurting. He made it his mission to lift people's spirits during the stay-at-home-orders of the Covid-19 pandemic. "SGN" was created: **Some Good News**. The YouTube videos were a hit, with millions after millions of views piling up. After all, who wouldn't be all for hearing *some good news* in the midst of what we've had happening?

Well, Alex Norcia has a different take. In his NY Times piece titled *The Hollow Inspiration of 'Some Good News,'* he wrote: (published June 11)

For two months, John Krasinski looked on the bright side. Beginning in late March and ending in late May...
... It [SGN] ended as a reminder of how little had really changed. ...

It is nearly impossible to imagine how "S.G.N." would function right now. Cities have erupted in protest against police brutality. Curfews have been instituted; the National Guard has been deployed. ... The difficulty of imagining another "S.G.N." exposes what was *nagging about it* all along. It was a well-intended distraction, but it was, as with so much else, *insufficient to the circumstances*. ... There was only ever one outcome available to "S.G.N.": Krasinski was always going to put on his pants (a reference to ending his effort). *Because before the good news, we may have to hear all the bad, and act on it.* www.nytimes.com/2020/06/11/magazine/the-hollow-inspiration-of-some-good-news.html

Some of the online comments to the NY Times article express agreement. One person wrote:

John Krasinski, who I find adorable, was not qualified to bring nutritious content to a starving public... The popularity of the show goes hand in hand with all the ways Americans opt for relief over actual health.

But other readers pushed back against the blistering critique, with comments that make the case: John Krasinski never set out to correct every evil in our country. One blistering shot back at the Times' article said:

This week we bring you "More Bad News," known as M.B.N., created by Alex Norcia. ...M.B.N. reminds us that John Krasinski didn't *save the world* and that the pandemic continues to ravage the planet. Stay tuned for next week's M.B.N., when Alex reviews the ridiculous, yet whimsical, cat You-Tube videos that fail to cure cancer.

And then there is this comment, with maybe the best opening line ever:

Seriously Eeyore? You can't appreciate Krasinski's ... positive idea to lighten and lift our spirits... We don't need you to guilt us about stepping away from excruciating reality to inject some sorely needed levity into one of the most painful times in US history.

So in the end, was SGN beneficial or not? You can lean toward either side of the debate. I've got my opinion. But either way, there is one comment - the wrap up from the article - that I want us to look at a little more closely: "There was only ever one outcome available to SGN," referencing ending it, "*Because before the good news, we may have to hear all the bad, and act on it.*" So the question I've got for you, based on that, is:

- If "before the good news" it is up to us "...to hear all the bad, and act on it" – seemingly in order to address and resolve all the problems –, when will we ever arrive at good news? What hope would we have?

The NY Times writer suggests that SGN was "insufficient to the circum-stances." Circumstances, yeah. Pandemic. And with it, so much uncertainty. You can find all sorts of statistics for the effects on mental health. Isolation, felt very acutely by many people. Then also, in our nation, Issues of injustice. Civil protests. Many peaceful, legitimate, legally protected demonstrations. We don't want to entangle,

muddle those with other incidents which have erupted, involving violence – rioting, looting. | And what about the future? What will it hold for... race relations in our nation, pandemic health-care related issues, the economy? How harsh of an impact will be felt from all this for individuals & families? That's a whole wallop of circumstances.

What is sufficient – in the face of all this – to arrive at resolution / peace?

I don't mean partial relief, as I bring that question up. I don't mean temporary relief. Let's think beyond that. How do we arrive at anything more than meager bandaids and patches in an effort to address the hurting in our broken world? Something longer lasting. Something more complete. Even whole, permanent relief.

- Isn't that the ultimate thing human hearts are longing for?

I don't think we should be surprised when we hear echoes of such longing. Is it that kind of an echo heard in the Times' article: "...to hear *all* the bad, and *act on it*," seemingly to bring healing?

But what could possibly be sufficient to bring such relief? | Actually, who could possibly be sufficient?

Jesus saw people hurting, as we heard described this morning in Matthew. | "Harassed and helpless." "Troubled and downcast." "Distressed and dejected." Those might sound like descriptions ripped from the headlines these past weeks. They are actually translations of what Jesus saw, as people gathered to Him. Ones "hurting and in turmoil."

Now here's the thing: this is the way life had long been in the world. This is what Jesus saw as He lived in the world broken by our sin. And this is what continues today. Look around, really.

Jesus has more to offer than a boost to temporarily lift up discouraged and weary people. He came on His mission to bring people the lasting cure. The cure for what's wrong in every one of us (whether individuals recognize it, and admit it, or not). Sin. It's the problem that is the absolute, needing a resolution for us sinners to be brought peace.

What was the solution? "Our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father loved us." Loved us enough that He, our God, plunged into our world – God the Son experienced the violence of the world first hand as He lived out His life for us, in our place. He then suffered the violent death He faced, and as He did He endured the punishment our sins deserved.

And so through all of what He did for us, He brings healing. He died, but then rose to life never-to-die-again, in order to bring that outcome of never-ending-perfect-life to all that place their hope and trust in Him.

The assurance of that very outcome is here in 2 Thes. 2:16-17. And I want you to especially walk away remembering 2 word pairs that uniquely convey this.

Our LORD God loved us and in His undeserved love gave us **Eternal encouragement** and **Good hope**.

Eternal means this is encouragement – comfort – that exists not only for a present crisis we are in. Eternal: it has an inexhaustible quality. So in all the crises we'll still face, and we will face them, His comfort to us remains: "It's all only temporary. And I'm with you. And I'm taking care of you. And I will continue. Nothing will ever change about that until I bring you - my children - to my eternal kingdom where all brokenness will be undone for good, all wounds will be removed, all the work of the devil will be overthrown and sent packing. Forever."

In His undeserved love our Lord God has given us Eternal encouragement and **Good hope**. Maybe the best way to understand what "Good hope" means is to contrast it with hope that isn't good, that turns

out bad. I heard an example of that given recently... a university professor cited as bad hope that some had: “the hope that the corona virus wouldn’t transmit to humans,” “the hope that it wouldn’t arrive at this part of the world.” And he suggested the conclusion that “maybe that led to some failures, like failures to take precautionary steps that could have helped limit the spread.” Another angle is: what about the hopes of individuals that this all would be cleared up quickly? People hoped that about Covid-19 because they wanted to be able to play their spring sport, or celebrate their graduation with their whole class, and on and on. When hopes are nothing more than a wish of what we want for the future, there’s the potential for a world of disappointment. Those hopes are based on mere possibilities – not facts/not certainties.

So when we come to this “Good hope” that God gives – Good hope from our God means it is: sure, based on facts, and no mere wishful thinking is in play. It is certain and it is lasting.

This “good” says that your future based on God’s work for you and God’s word to you is certain, beyond all doubt. This “good hope” gathers up the times of sadness you face, and sorrow you feel, and violence and hurt you experience, and turbulence and upheaval you endure —all into one collection – to which God speaks, “In all of it, You are mine! I am yours! And I will bring an end – in the end – to all the hurt for you!”

The Lord, with His Good Hope and eternal encouragement breathes new confidence and gives new strength to these hearts – yours and mine – for the road ahead.

Your house or car or clothes may still need repairs or to be replaced. And if not now, the time will come they do. Cancer and covid-19, as well as so many other diseases, still exist. Your body is still susceptible to them. Some of you are facing them right now. But you have life that is unending in the promise of our Living and Eternal Savior – the Savior of such hurting ones like you and me.

He is THE solution that is sufficient for bringing us to the ultimate peace for which our hearts so desperately yearn – the life which God created for us in the first place – life with Him, life without sin or hurt or sadness of any kind.

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, **encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word.*** Those last words tell us...

You and I aren’t left to simply sit by as we “hear all the bad,” which the New York Times article’s concluding statement cites. You have a heart set right, filled with God’s truth and the right motive, for truly seeing and treating all people as equal. You have a heart set right, filled with God’s love and the right motive for showing selfless love to others. And you know the news of the only “hope and healing” that is lasting to offer to the hurting people of our world. So...

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and establish you in every good work and word. Amen.