

# “There is Hope in Your Future!”

*The Reverend Dr. Robert M. Zanicky*

*First Presbyterian Church*

*Wilkes-Barre, PA*

*Jeremiah 31:7-17*

*February 24, 2008*

I recently read about these identical twins. One was a hope filled optimist. He would say, “Everything is coming up roses!” The other twin was a sad and hopeless pessimist. He thought that Murphy’s Law was optimistic. Well, the worried parents of the boys took them to a psychologist. She suggested to the parents a plan to balance their twins’ personalities. “On their next birthday, put them in separate rooms to open their gifts. Give the pessimist the best toys you can find, and give the optimist a box of manure.”

The parents followed the instructions and carefully observed the results. When they peeked in on the pessimist, they heard him audibly complaining: “I don’t like the color of this computer... I’ll bet this calculator will break...I don’t like this game...I know someone who got a better cell phone than this one...” Tip-toeing across the hall, the parents peeked in and saw their little optimist gleefully moving the manure around. He was giggling. “You can’t fool me! Where there is this much manure, there’s gotta be a pony!”

Don’t you love it!? The young fellow, still optimistic enough to go through all the “garbage” – convinced “there’s gotta be a pony!”

This morning I want you to stop and consider within your own life whether you’ve allowed the “garbage” (disappointments, curves, hurdles, tragedies) to eclipse your optimism for life. The “garbage” gets piled higher and higher! Doesn’t it? Really? Some of us have gotten to the point where even “good things” are viewed with distrust. We’re just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Pessimism seems so ubiquitous!

In my vast research for this morning’s sermon, I was surprised to come across a website titled, “The Daily Downer: A downer a day keeps the optimist away.” Friday’s Daily Downer was a lament that now having HDTV in 15 channels that he thoroughly enjoy, he also has 200 non-HDTV channels and pays \$12.00 extra a month for HDTV. “I was perfectly happy with the channels I had before, but now that I have 15 awesome channels in HD, I have 200 others that I can’t stand to watch anymore.”

They even have a “Negative thought of the Day.” “Are you completely happy with your life?” “I don’t think so.”

Ouch!

Friends, allow me to remind you those of us alive right now, here in the United States are living in the age of abundance. Here’s how Brink Lindsey phased it in his new book, The Age of Abundance: How Prosperity Transformed Americas Politics and Culture, this way;

“In the years after World War II, America crossed a great historical threshold. In all prior civilizations and social orders, the vast bulk of humanity had been preoccupied with responding to basic material needs. Postwar America, however, was different. An extensive

and highly complex division of labor unleashed immense productive powers far beyond anything in prior human experience. As a result, the age-old bonds of scarcity were broken. Concern with physical survival and security was now banished to the periphery of social life.”

He is arguing that this liberation from material necessity marks a fundamental change in the human condition. We have moved from a culture of overcoming scarcity to one of expanding and enjoying abundance.

Many of us need to reawaken optimism, future expectations, hope in your life.  
How optimistic are you? Is the glass half empty or half full? Is there any glass at all?

I took another Optimistic test on-line (you can take it at Beliefnet.com). Overall, I'd say it was fairly accurate (only 10 questions). Out of four categories, it placed me in the next to highest in being optimistic. My category was – “Sunshine with Patchy Fog” The other categories are: Thunderstorms – “Your outlook on life isn't too cheery.” (An understatement!) Scattered Showers: “Your view of life is relatively balance, but you lean more toward pessimism than optimism.” Then there is, Bright Sunshine “Life is great!”

I believe that! I was close, but some reality cropped in. As I've shared before, I'm a “Realist with Optimistic Tendencies.” How would you answer these questions:

**Q4.** You're trying a new low-carb diet to get ready for the summer, but you just can't lose those last five pounds. It's because:

1.  I must have been wrong about my ideal weight - this is probably where I should be.
2.  I must be eating things I'm not supposed to without realizing it.
3.  I'm just doomed to be heavier than I want to be.
4.  Diets are hard to stick to. I'll just keep trying.

**Q8.** Your kid fails a math exam in school. Your reaction:

1.  He must not have been taught the concepts properly.
2.  He must not have studied hard enough this time.
3.  He must be bad at math.
4.  I'm sure he'll do better next time

I apparently lost points by answering “He must not have studied hard enough this time.” Apparently the most optimistic answer was, “I'm sure he'll do better next time.” Certainly that's true! But if he'd only studied harder! (There's that realism.)

Really – How optimistic are you? Maybe I should ask how pessimistic are you? (Some of you have already thought, I need to go to that “Daily Downer Page.”)

My friends, you need a healthy dose of optimism in your life! Our scriptures are filled with such declarations of hope, the future, redemption, second, third, fourth chances! Biblical Optimism! I'm sure it has something to do with being created in “The image of God.”

It's amazing – reading the Bible, with all those human foibles, human misbehaviors, human failures and sins – you might be tempted to think God should be a pessimist.

But No! No way! God is always future oriented when it comes to us.

Now, about those people of Israel; not especially known for their optimism, but always being challenged by Yahweh to change their ways, get back on board and look up!

I read from Jeremiah this morning. Jeremiah covers Josiah's reforms (627 BCE) through the fall of Jerusalem (circa 587/586 BCE).

Both Israel and Jeremiah had intense reasons to be pessimistic about their lives. They lost their country to the Neo-Babylonians. Many were ripped from their homes and taken into exile. All where under the thumb of a foreign despot.

The people of Israel listened to the wrong prophet, Hananiah, ignoring Jeremiah's warnings and council. This cost them much. Added heartache. And Jeremiah loving his God and his people is in the middle with the people rejecting his path. They were deep into the "garbage", and there was no pony in sight.

Day in and day out – pessimism reigned! Day after day, month after month, year after year – it's all the same – just existing, not free, no sense of worth or value.

While Israel is still in this state, through Jeremiah Yahweh now declare: "Sing aloud with gladness... The Lord has saved his people..." God is gathering his people back together! It's time!! Optimism is in the air!!! They are going to stride by familiar brooks once again. They'll be home! They are going to be radiant!

God declares: "They shall languish no more!" "I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow... There is hope for your future!"

Can you hear this? Really hear this? It's a vision also for you!

- No more languishing. Turn the corner.
- Dare to smile, have some joy in your life.
- Trade sorrow for gladness.

And take this in! There is hope for your future!

I'm sure, many people of Israel, were desperately wanting this to be true, but dare they hope, dare they take this optimistic view? "But Jeremiah was right earlier, and we were wrong. Now he's telling us these words from Yahweh." Yes, yes – we'll dare!!

Sickness, betrayal, disappointment, and a plethora of other maladies may be bombarding you – right now – you can choose to live, exist in the "garbage", the pessimism, or you can dare to live – getting up every day of your life acknowledging –

There is hope for your future!

There is hope for my future!

Amen.