

Christian Hope

By Dennis Cornish

Hope for the Christian is defined as the anticipation of the fulfillment of God's purposes based upon God's covenant faithfulness and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as it is known to us by the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church (see Romans 8:18-25)¹. Therefore, a Christian's hope must be understood as being inseparable from his faith, trust, and belief in God. A Christian's hope is not a wish for something that may or may not happen, nor does it mean our hope lacks certainty, but that it is grounded in real events that will come to pass. A Christian's hope represents our present anticipation of what will surely be experienced in its future fullness. As Christians, our hope in God means that we have a sure expectation of Him to be true to His Word.

If we know that Jesus is full of grace and truth, and that He is the Word become flesh, then we also know that the hope we have in Him will reach its culmination when we encounter the fullness of our salvation as we stand alongside the saints that have gone before, all of us completely immersed in glorifying our Savior throughout eternity. It is by way of the assurance of this coming reality that our faith and love are sustained in the present time.

Hope persists as a human necessity if one begins to make any attempt at imagining what the future will bring, even if there are no apparent rational grounds for that hope. Word usage and the context surrounding them matter, and the hope that the world relies upon is one based upon their desire for an outcome that they wish for. Unfortunately, it is usually founded on some yearning for eventuality, or a dream that they long to have come to fruition, each of these hinging entirely upon the outside chance that they would somehow come true. These types of hope are hopeless in their composition because God and His promises are not in them.

Jesus is the only hope that can fulfill our godly desires. He alone is the what and the Who that we need, and in Him all our circumstances fade in the light of His glory. He is the foundation of our hope when we glorify Him as “...*fellow citizens with the saints and*

¹ Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms

members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:19-21).

Paul also writes about hope in Colossians 1:4-5 where he thanks God for their faith in Christ and their unmistakable love towards the saints, further commenting that the faith and love that they possess is generated by their hope and that their hope is laid up for them in heaven. Hope nurtures us and draws us to a more fulfilling life of ardent faith in Christ. Paul also tells us that Christian hope is neither vague nor vain, it does not deal in possibilities but is grounded in the certainty we read about in Ephesians, (1:14), where we are taught that we have already been given the Holy Spirit’s guarantee of our down payment on the inheritance that we will assuredly possess. In Titus 2:13, Paul reminds us that we are: *“...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”* The hope we hold onto so dearly today is a mere foreshadow of the reality that awaits us in our heavenly home. The more we meditate on this, the more we think about the glory that awaits us as co-heirs with Christ, the less we dwell on the earthly things that are so quickly fading.

Paul also teaches us in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 how we are to view our current or prevailing circumstances and temperaments when he wrote: *“since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation”.*

“The secular world’s outlook on hope, in view of the everchanging circumstances in life, is like trying to fly a kite as it continues to be at the mercy of every gusting and swirling wind, whereas our Christian hope is more akin to our having *“a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19-20).”*²

Our blessed hope is also seen as being linked to patience, steadfastness, and perseverance, and this allows one to remain joyful in their soul even in the face of their

² A partial paraphrase from the New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition’s definition of hope.

suffering. We previously mentioned the interconnection between love, faith, and hope and it bears repeating that hope cannot exist apart from faith, and love cannot be applied without hope. These three inseparable characteristics are what comprise the Christian way of life.

The perfect fullness and richness of our hope will only come to pass when we are finally at rest in our eternal home, and yet we can be assured of having a present hope for the brokenness we experience through repentance of our sin. However, true repentance, and its requisite contrition, can only come about because of the redeeming and radical transformation that is wrought by God's work of regeneration and the forgiveness that is ours as God reconciles His people to Himself. Yes, we are sinners and sometimes slip into grievous sin, but more importantly we each are a child of God and thereby benefit from the greatness of His mercy and grace. He alone is our only hope in our fallenness as He brings calm to the shipwreck of our seemingly empty lives. Put into different words, He, and the empty tomb that represents His resurrection, are the only hope for our own emptiness, He is our firm and steady anchor in times of trouble. Our hope is based upon His great and glorious promises found in both the Old and New Testaments, many of which have come to pass, and as for the other of His precious promises, we rest our hope upon their future fulfillment because they are God's promises, and His word is immutable. We live in faith and have reconciled ourselves to Him through the right living and guidance we experience through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

You might wonder what about today? I am suffering because of the loss of a loved one, I am in misery because of the ravages of cancer, my child was born with physical disabilities, and worse yet, the doctors have no recourse. Where is my hope?

Some solace can be found in the closing verses of Old Testament book of Habakkuk, in his response to God's sovereignty, he concludes that no matter what devastating circumstance he finds himself in, he will wait and rejoice upon the Lord as his salvation. This is a reminder to us that we should look at the totality of what the Lord has done for us and that will strengthen our faith and hope in Him.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul speaks to believers about those who have proceeded them in death, he wanted to assure them that they need not lament in the same manner as pagan unbelievers who have no hope grieve. He reminds them that just as Christ died and was resurrected, God will bring them home with Jesus at His second advent. Paul is not teaching that you should not mourn the death of a loved one, but to do so in the faith of God's sovereign promises of an everlasting life for those who abide in Him.

Elsewhere, "Peter teaches us that we ought to bless God because of His great mercy to us in rescuing us through Jesus. He has given us new birth. We may not feel it in the newness of the current crisis that has intruded into our life, but the salvation that is ours is an act of God's great mercy. Despite our present anguish, we need to take the time to go to Him in prayer and praise Him for His goodness, blessing God that our souls are being held safely in His hands. This eternal promise is something that far outweighs all our current and momentary troubles. We have a God who has rescued us for all eternity, even when we don't feel rescued because of our current yet temporal circumstance."³ This rescue, this salvation that is ours through the finished work of Christ can never be snatched away from us. Paul tells us in Romans 8:38-39 *"that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*. This is the hope that is ours when all else seems lost. This is the truth that we cling to when life suddenly confronts us with what we are helpless to deal with on our own. These are the things that we need to go to prayer with, these are the burdens we must share with fellow believers who can comfort us with their mere presences, or a blessed word of encouragement when we are downtrodden. The hope we find when we are helpless, and therefore hopeless, is the hope we have in Christ, and the knowledge that He will never fail us. Our hope is in God Himself, for He is our portion and our inheritance, (Psalms 16:5-6). Hope is a precious gift from God, and it is linked to His merciful grace, and it is sustained in us by His Spirit. Paul, in Romans 5:1-5, teaches us that: *"... since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have*

³ Portions of this quote were paraphrased from an article by Rev. Mez McConnell, senior pastor of Niddrie Community Church in Edinburgh, Scotland, and featured in *Tabletalk Magazine* (Sanford, FL, Ligonier Ministries, Inc., June 2016).

also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Hope is a gift, and like our faith, when properly cultivated, moves us from times of despair to the reality of God's sovereign mercies and grace as we fix our eyes upon Jesus. The fulfillment of our hope will be eternally ours as we dwell in the house of the Lord and our faith, trust, and hope will have become sight as we stand before His radiant glory, endlessly worshipping Him in all His majesty. Biblical hope supports a confident assertion that all those who are converted by grace through faith and who confess Jesus as Lord will come alive in Him in a new dimension immediately upon their physical death. Today we are "in" Christ; at death we shall be "with" Christ while awaiting our glorified bodies, and our hope will have become an actuality.

This blessed hope is ours, but as Christians it is our obligation to share this hope as we tell others of Christ and the love that He has for them, but we are to do so in the way 1st Peter 3:15 instructs us, where we read: *"... in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect ..."*

"For each of us who are in Christ there is an end to history as we know it but should be viewed as a good ending in that it is the culmination of the Christian hope we have been talking about, and that makes it a history that ends well. Revelation 21 and 22 contain the future fulfillment of God's promises, strongly supporting the hope contained within the Christian worldview; that of the consummation of God's redemptive plan when Christ ushers in the new heaven and the new earth. This will be a time of great peace and joy, with no more pain, suffering, death, or tears. This will be the fulfillment of our eschatological hope when there is a renewal of God's creation with a cessation of all

things that are counter to God and His glory as He refines and purifies His created order.”⁴

The cherished hope we have been speaking of is not an everlasting hope as there will be no need for it in the New Jerusalem. The advent of a new heaven and a new earth will be the fulfilment or the conclusion of redemptive history and, as mentioned above, it is called our eschatological hope. This hope is based upon the certainty of the forthcoming zenith of Christ’s triumph over Satan when He casts him into *“the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10)”*.

In Revelation 21:3-4 John heard *“a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

This is the very pinnacle of what it means to be a Christian whose hope is in Christ alone.

⁴ Heavily paraphrased from Cornelis Venema’s article Eschatological Hope and Fulfillment, from *Tabletalk Magazine* (Sanford, FL, Ligonier Ministries, Inc., April 2021).