

# How's Your Hope?

**Introduction.** Do you know what's missing in the cultural dialogue these days? Hope. We seem to do a great job focusing on the problem and pointing out the shortcomings and sins of others and very little time pointing toward a preferred future.

Hope in Christ isn't a pie-in-the-sky that floats above reality. It's as gritty as the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of the dead. Which means our message and lives need to get into the grit of addictions, conflict, brokenness, and the utter fragility of life and fight for hope. As Bruce Cockburn once said, "You need to kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight."

Hope that's divorced from reality isn't really hope. But hope that goes into the dark places and cracks open a wedge of light that eventually floods the room is exactly what we need.

People have chased the false hopes of carnal pleasure, possessions, and position. Yet these have left them empty, hollow, and unfulfilled — with little expectation of change. We assemble to provide what our hope-starved world craves.

The New Testament offers a different hope that rises above secular, material, and temporal aspirations. The Bible speaks of the Colossians' faith "because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Colossians 1:5).

Further in the chapter, Paul reminds them that they were once engrossed in "wicked works," but now they've been "reconciled," and brought into a special relationship with the Lord — one of holiness and hope with a heavenward view (vv. 21-22). However, he indicates it is conditional (v. 23).

Sadly, even some Christians have wavered in their faith, left their first love, and found themselves estranged from "the hope of the gospel." Others haven't quit, but they're lukewarm, apathetic, and indifferent. Then there are those who are hanging on, but not growing, not progressing spiritually, and not achieving their best potential.

Our confidence is not misplaced. It's not wishful thinking. It's not whistling in the dark. The confidence of our hope is in Christ (Hebrews 3:6). It's the "one hope" of our calling (Ephesians 4:4) that unifies, fortifies, and strengthens the body of Christ, and each individual believer. There's four tremendous descriptions of the gospel's hope that we'll study in our lesson today.

## ***I. It's a Good Hope***

- A. "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace" (2 Thessalonians 2:16).
- B. Why is it good? "Good" means "profitable, generous, upright, and virtuous." This hope is good because it's given to us by God. And it's given to us by His grace (Ephesians 2:4-5). We don't have to earn it!
- C. The religions of the day found little place for hope, but hope rings through the New Testament, and it's much more than the mild optimism that often passes for hope in modern times.

1. In the New Testament hope has something of the note of certainty about it, because it's grounded in the divine nature and rests on the divine promises. It's the gift of grace, and a hope based on God's grace can never be disappointed (cp. Romans 5:5).
2. It's a good hope, not confined to minor issues of the here and now, but it reaches down into the depths of us and reaches over into eternity. The aspect of hope in what's to come should change all of our lives, in all aspects and circumstances:
  - a) Hope makes us fruitful.
  - b) Hope delivers us from self-indulgence.
  - c) Hope gives us confidence in hard times.
  - d) Hope gives us greater purpose in life.
  - e) Hope reorients our desires.
  - f) Hope fuels the mission of God.

## **II. It's a Better Hope**

- A. "For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (Hebrews 7:19).
- B. Why is it better?
  1. The weakness of the Old Covenant has already been stressed — and this weakness doesn't inspire much hope.
  2. The Old Covenant did have shadows of the afterlife which were demonstrated in the lives of individuals like Enoch and Elijah (Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11). It was experienced by people like Job (13:15; 14:13-17; 19:25-27). It was also declared by Old Testament writers (Psalm 49:15; 73:24-26).
    - a) Almost all ancient Jewish believers affirmed the existence of an afterlife and the immortality of the soul.
    - b) While the Sadducees denied the existence of the afterlife, Josephus records that all other Jews believed "the souls are immortal, and continue forever" and were subject to reward or "eternal punishment."
  3. The New Testament really brings the concept of hope into sharp focus. Hope is a characteristic of the Hebrew epistle (cp. 3:6; 6:11, 18; 10:23; also the use of the verb in 11:1) although it occurs much more frequently in Paul's other epistles (31 times).
    - a) The idea of hope as a means by which we draw near to God continues from the thought of 6:19, which mentions the kind of hope which even penetrates within the veil, i.e. in direct proximity to God.
    - b) It's worth noting that man's drawing near to God occurs as the concluding exhortation of the doctrinal part of the epistle (10:22). In spite of an awesome view of God in 12:29, there's still the encouragement to approach in worship. Only a better system than the old could stimulate such encouragement.

### **III. It's a Blessed Hope**

- A. "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).
- B. Here the hope is emphatically called "the blessed hope," the hope of Christ's second coming in glory, the hope which is the joy and life, and the strength and comfort of every godly soul.
  - 1. Titus 2:12 closed with a reference to this present age, but the Christian looks also to the future.
  - 2. In the New Testament hope doesn't indicate merely what's wished for but what's assured. That's why we can have confidence. It's a particularly joyful possession for the Christian, hence the description "blessed."
    - a) This is the only place in the New Testament where "blessed" is applied to an object which doesn't itself enjoy the blessing, but is a source of blessing to others.
    - b) Of the fifty passages where it occurs it's applied in forty-three to persons, twice to God, three times to parts of the body (the virgin's womb, and the eyes and ears of those who saw and heard Christ), once impersonally in Acts 20:35, and once, in this passage, to the hope.

### **IV. It's a Living Hope**

- A. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).
- B. Why a living hope? Because of Jesus' resurrection. His victory over sin, death, and the devil gives us hope of our victory — and our eternal resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). He was the firstfruits from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). When we are brought forth in truth, we become the firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18).
- C. Friends, the hope of the gospel should embolden you to keep on keeping on even in the face of trials, tribulation, and temptations.
  - 1. The hope of the gospel offers spiritual security, emotional support, and peace of mind.
  - 2. The hope of the gospel provides the impetus and motivation for personal and spiritual growth, for discipline in discipleship, for purity in Christian living, for strength to withstand Satan's assaults, and for the determination to echo the attitude of the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:13-14; cp. Romans 6:8-11).

**Conclusion.** In the darkest days of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, God asked Jeremiah to go out and buy a piece of real estate — complete with witnesses, a deed, and money (Jeremiah 32:6-15). This act seemed to make no sense, since Judah was about to be conquered and its people taken into exile. But in seventy years, as God reminded Jeremiah, the people would be set free and return to the land to rebuild homes and replant vineyards. Jeremiah's purchase of land was to provide a beacon of hope during the long years of captivity.

Bob Seiple wrote that his father, at age seventy-five, planted a number of small fruit trees. “What an optimist,” he told him, somewhat mockingly. His dad passed away many years ago, and he said that now when he returns to his old homestead, he has an option. He can go to the grassy cemetery on top of the hill and brood over his grave, or he can eat the fruit of his trees and reflect on a man who knew a great deal about hope.

What you are today, you don’t have to be tomorrow. You can change, develop, grow, and improve. One day, you can receive a new body that’s immortal and incorruptible. And live in a new place that’s undefiled, unfading, and imperishable.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant offered these three rules for happiness: “Someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for.” The hope of the gospel provides all three.

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