

Blessed Hope

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Do you realize that hope is a real blessing to the soul?

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Romans 15:13).

These are words of the Apostle Paul to the Roman believers. It would seem that if a believer has some hope and then God blesses him in this hope with all joy and peace in believing, it causes him to abound in hope. "Through the power of the Holy Ghost" indicates he would not have the kind of hope apart from the inworking and the indwelling and the operation of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit shows the things of Christ, and that will be obvious now as we think about what hope is.

The idea of hope has been largely blurred in our thinking because of the popular usage of the term. So often I may say, "I hope Friday will be a nice day." That actually is not what we mean. I do not have any idea what Friday is going to be like, the weather being as it is. When I say, "I hope Friday will be a nice day," what I actually mean is, "I wish Friday would be a nice day." Usually when I have some personal preference in mind I mean more than just "I wish." When I have personal interest, I do not say I wish this or I wish that; but I hope so and so. That means I have an extra interest in the outcome. Because saying "I wish" can be quite neutral, so I say "I hope," meaning "I wish very much" that such and such a thing would happen. But that is not the way the word "hope" actually is meant to be used.

Faith, believing, may be inspired by the situation as it is. For example, I believe what? I believe what I have been told. I believe what I see. I believe the operation of the processes with which I am acquainted. Now faith can be used in any tense. I can believe what has happened, I can believe what is happening now. I can believe certain things will happen. On the basis of things being as they are I can say, "I believe such and such to be true." But "hope" is focused specifically, definitely on the future. When I say "hope" I am looking forward. There is some outcome that I really expect to come to pass. I can "wish" for whatever I would like, but I can "hope" only for what I truly expect. A person can wish for anything he wants, but he can hope only for what he expects. About that you would have to think on what basis are you going to expect it? When anyone says "I hope" it is a proper thing to ask him, "Why?" On what grounds do you hope? On what grounds do you have confident expectations that such and such a thing is going to come to pass? If you do have that, you can properly say "I hope." Your hope can be more if you keep in mind on what grounds you expect these things. This can be felt when Peter writes:

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (I Peter 3:15).

Can you understand why we say that hope refers to things that have not yet happened ?

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it (Romans 8:24-25).

Expectation actually affects a person.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (I John 3:1-3).

To be saved means more than to be free from the threat of ultimate destruction. That is a nice way of saying that when I say that I am saved, I mean something more than that I am not going to hell. Now I do mean that, and for that I am grateful. Believe me, I thank God every day for that blessed assurance. It comes to my mind over and over again. I am not going to get what I deserve.

It humbles me to think that it cost the Lord Jesus Christ His life, His blood, to see to it that I could be saved from the consequences of my own sinful way of doing things. But being saved means more than that. It means sometime in the ultimate future, way off in the distance, I *am* going to be saved from hell. But it means more than that, it means I am going to heaven, which is also true. But it also means something here in this world right now. This brings in the idea of being "salved." Put an "I" in that word "saved" and call it "salved," and you will have the basis of the word "salvation." It includes the idea of "being salved," something happening to heal a person. When a person has hope he has the confident expectation of something good going to happen.

There is an alternate word. There is another word on the other side of the page, and that would be "fear." Hope is for something desirable; fear is for something undesirable. They both point to the future. Hope is comforting because of what I am sure is going to happen. Fear is threatening because of what I am afraid is going to happen.

Tomorrow will come, and what will happen tomorrow I do not know. No man knows the future. What happens tomorrow may be unknown to us, but the future is not entirely a gamble. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." That is for sure. If a man has done wrong, his heart and mind will be filled with fears. If a man has been obedient to God, he will find that he has in his heart and mind hope; and when a man has hope, he governs himself accordingly. He is expecting to come into the presence of God. He is expecting to be dealt with by God in mercy and grace. He is expecting also to be in heaven. He is expecting to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is expecting that God will be with him all the days of his life. He is expecting that God will actually affect him. He is expecting that God will lead him and teach him. He is expecting that God will show him.

When the heart has hope, it is illumined. It is just as though there were a bright light shining, but it is the reflection of a bright light shining forward pointing to the future. God is going to do things. He said He was going to do things; and He will do things. He will do these things for us. These things come to our minds when we think about being saved by hope. It is a wonderful thing to have hope, faith, and confidence in God.

Do you realize that when we have no confidence in God we have no hope ?

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

This is perhaps the most unhappy condition that we can think of the human being experiencing. We wake up in the morning and we realize we have living to do; but if there is nothing to look forward to, a great many people just feel as if it would not be worth getting up. If they do have to get up they are going to protest. All day long they are going to feel put out. I think perhaps that is one reason why so many people fall into the habit and the pastime of killing time. Have you ever thought about that? How many people talk about killing time.

Time is one of the most precious things we have, and yet any number of us go about various ways of trying to find out some nice, easy way to kill time. This would be partly because we would have no hope. Please notice how Paul puts it: "Having no hope, and without God in the world." Sad? Yes, but common and quite natural. This will account for the strain that marks the faces of so many persons you will see, and the anguish that you can feel in them as you see them moving about. They really find actual living itself a drain, because there is nothing moving ahead of them, nothing ahead that they are looking forward to.

Tomorrow will come and they know it: "I must live facing my problems and facing my situation." When I have no assurance, if I have no expectation; and if I have no hope, it is just bad.

This is not exceptional amongst human beings. In fact it is quite ordinary. This is how people are. We know that issues will arise. We know that tasks will confront us. We have the day's work to do. We have problems that will develop, and the question is, "How can we manage?" When there is nobody but me, I can become increasingly dejected. Then I have no hope. I know about me. I lived with me yesterday. I lived with me the day before. I have lived with me a long time, and if it is going to be up to me I would just as soon the day did not come.

Sometimes we put our trust in someone, some person, as when we turn to some leader or some group. We just want to be with that person or with that group, because then there might be some chance. But notice how Paul puts it, "You were without Christ." That was one of the reasons for our dejection. Of course, without Christ you are on your own. No wonder you have no hope, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," that is aliens from the fellowship of those who trust in God. What an unhappy, sad experience to live alone, by yourself, with nobody but you! No wonder you have no hope. "Strangers from the covenants of promise" – God would have made certain promises, and God has offered to do certain things; but you are a stranger to all that, being without God in the world. It is Christ in you, it is the communion of the saints, the fellowship of believing people, it is holding some promise of God that will give you the hope. No wonder the Lord Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

Can you see how confidence is so essential to hope ?

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Hebrews 6: 19).

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (I Peter 3: 15).

The basic element in hope is confidence. You could have confidence in the natural situation as you see it, because you understand things as they are; or because you could recognize the processes that are at work and see how they are going to turn out. If you were able to feel they are favorable, you could feel confident about the future and could have some hope about the future on the basis of that.

Or again you might have some confidence in the persons that are involved. Perhaps you are going to be in a project with certain people for one reason or another, and maybe you have been with those people before and they make you feel confident because they are able, diligent, and they are minded to do this work. Under the conditions you could have hope that things will get done.

You could also have confidence in the sovereign benevolence of God. You could have in mind right now that your life is just as Almighty God would have it be. He has His eye on you and me for good, and He means to do us good. Because God is benevolent you could expect that things will turn out well. Confidence in the overruling power of God, in the everlasting goodness of God, will add up to trust. I can trust Him. When I am saying that I trust God, I mean I do not know what is going to happen, but I am satisfied it will turn out well. Why? Because God is in heaven, and God does all things well.

When you come to the matter of hope, you can be a little more specific. The defining element in hope would actually motivate you in the promises of God. The promises of God point specifically in so many words to some conclusion that God will produce. When the believer cherishes some promise of God in faith, he has hope that it will occur. He confidently expects what is promised will happen. It may not be in sight now, but he is expecting it. Why? Because God said He would do it, and he trusts God.

Many things man does not know, but there is nothing that God does not know. He knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning. He can tell us what He is going to do. When He tells us what He is

going to do, and we put our trust in Him, that specific thing becomes the hope of our heart. By way of encouraging man to yield himself into the will of God, God reveals His promises. So here is then the reason for the hope that is in us. We trust God to do us good, and we believe what God has said that He will do.

Are you ready now to stop and take this to your own heart? First of all let me say you will need to have this confidence in God that you trust Him. If you cannot trust God, then you certainly cannot trust anything, and you certainly do not have any hope at all. But if you can trust God, then you can read His Word, get to know what He has promised, and believe the promises of God, and they will generate the hope that is in you.

Do you understand why the second coming of Christ is spoken of as "the blessed hope?"

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

This is the place in Scripture where this phrase is recorded that is so commonly used, "the blessed hope." Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have the prospect of much blessing. We can have in mind that God is the Creator of all men. God is benevolent to all men, and knows about man and his weakness and problems. The very nature of God, as is shown in His handiwork, sets out before all mankind the law of God, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But then we know the Gospel tells us that God sent His Son into the world to seek and to save the lost. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life." This everlasting life is going to come after we leave this world, but we need to get into our minds that this everlasting life is also going on now. It is everlasting. The person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shares in the everlasting life of God. This is a great blessing, and the believer with this blessing in hand looks forward with hope.

Because he has the mind of Christ in him, the believer by the Holy Spirit trusts God. He believes God is Almighty, and he believes God is benevolent. He accepts the Word of God, "Nothing shall by any means hurt you," and takes great comfort from that. He relaxes in the rest that is promised to him by the Savior. He has no dread of tomorrow because he hears the Word saying, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." For him God is on the throne holding the whole world in His hands. He is satisfied that God is aware of all possibilities, watching over the believer, the child of God.

The believer knows that God has a plan, and in His own time He will send His Son. Now when the Son of God comes again, all who have ever believed will be with Him, and every eye shall see Him. This brings us to what Titus has called "that blessed hope." To see Christ face to face is the blessed hope of the believer. That is to say it is the hope of the blessing that comes in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer lives in that every day.

It is his privilege each morning when he gets up to face the day to have in mind that this day the Lord will watch over me. This day the Lord will walk with me. This day the Lord will take me by the hand and lead me in His ways. Such confidence is the privilege of the believer. He does not have to work for it. He cannot possibly qualify for it because he is not good enough, and he cannot be wise enough to know how to do this; but he is to be with God. In addition to every other blessing he has the prospect that one day he shall see the Lord Jesus face to face. That is the blessed hope that the believer can cherish in his heart and soul. This is a great comfort to everyone who believes.

In the book of Acts in chapter 24 we have Paul's wonderful affirmation of what he believes and how he lives. As he describes this before the governor he concludes in speaking of himself:

And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust (Acts 24:15).

When a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ he is born again by the Word and the Spirit. The

believer does not have to do anything about that. He does not have to climb any hills, run any fast miles, swim any river, or even endure any great thing. This is something God does, and God will see that it is done right.

This believer is born again by the Word of the Spirit. He is given the Holy Spirit of God who will activate the will of the Lord in the heart of the believer. The Holy Spirit will actually control the heart of the believer that he will be led in the ways of God. One truth is certain – Christ in you will lead you to turn to the Scriptures as the Word of God. Oftentimes one could wonder throughout the day, "Well if Christ is in me, what does He want me to do now?" I think that many times you could be very easily led to feel that He would like to have me look into the Word of God. If you, as a believer, ever have moments when you are not sure of just how things are going, or how you yourself stand before God, open the Bible. Read it and let these words come back into your heart. I want to tell you those words of Scripture are the very Word of God.

Another truth will surely follow. If you turn to the Scriptures you will nurture your faith. If you believe at all you will believe more, and if you have any confidence in the Lord God, you will have more confidence in Him. If you understand anything about the Gospel, you will understand it better as you read. You will believe what is written as from God.

As you read it, you will be aware of the fact that the Bible teaches the resurrection. So you will believe in a resurrection of the dead both of the just and unjust. With this faith you will have the hope of the resurrection. Now here is an interesting thing: the unforgiven sinner is going to be raised from the dead, too, but he does not have any hope about that. He has fear about that. The unforgiven sinner will fear the resurrection because he is going to have to face the God whom he disobeyed and whom he ignored. But the forgiven soul will have hope about the resurrection and about being reconciled to God. The resurrection will be wonderful, not only because of the fellowship that believers will have, but also because of the fellowship with the Lord and with those who have gone on before. This will be unbroken forever. There will be no separation. But the person will be changed. The resurrection actually means that I will be different than I used to be, without spot and without wrinkle. Because of this in the grace of God there will be no fearful awaiting the judgment, but there will be a joyous communion with the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. It is no wonder that the Lord could say when He had just given this Word, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." As He completes that Word He says, "Comfort ye one another with these words."

Do you know why the hope of the glory of God will bring joy to the believer?

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2).

It is so easy to fall into the way of thinking that the glory of God is only in heaven, even as it is natural to think that the wrath of God will be only in hell. We are wrong on both counts. God is working now in this world, in the land of the living, with all men. God sees all that is going on, and He is always acting in judgment. There is no time when God's attention slacks. He sees everything as it is, and He evaluates it as it takes place, and He appraises every person living before Him. God sees everything and is actually in everything that happens.

Now let us see if we can bring this up to our everyday experience. Let me again do as I so often do and take you into the garden. There I want to show you how the beans grow as of God. That is blessing. It will lead to glory. The weeds grow as of God. That is cursing. That will lead into wrath. All that is going on right now. God is doing both.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Galatians 6:7-8)

I do not have to wait to die and be put in the cemetery for me to go into life everlasting. I need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Door. If I believe in Him now, I have life everlasting now. This is a way of referring to the life of God.

Paul rejoiced in the hope that he would be blessed now according to the promises of God. This meant that in his weakness he would be made strong. When he confessed his sins, he would be forgiven now, and could live in the openness of God's presence. So far as his burdens were concerned, he could cast them upon the Lord now, and they would be removed now and carried by Almighty God. So far as his fears were concerned, he could turn in his fears to God, and when he did he would have confidence now. His sorrow would be turned into joy now.

This is what Paul meant when he said he rejoiced in hope of the glory of God. The word "glory" refers to the consequences, to the harvest time, to the results. Paul not only would have every good thing strengthened, but there is included in this another wonderful thought: his own mistakes, his own errors, his own sins would not result in worse things happening which would be the wrath of God. He rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.

In the course of his tragic sea voyage the Apostle Paul gave expression to confident expectations as he looked forward. We have defined "hope" as a word that refers to the confident expectation a person has when he looks forward into the future.

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me (Acts 27:23-25).

To believe that in heaven God will perform His will seems reasonable. I might say offhand that would not require much exercise of faith. If you knew about God, had any idea about God, and you had any idea about heaven, it would just make sense that in heaven God would perform His will. To believe that in general God will accomplish His purpose seems credible: and we can offhand think, "I can believe that." But let me say to you gently, you have not believed much.

To believe that something will happen today because He said so yesterday puts a strain on our faith. Yesterday He made a promise. Today is it going to come to pass? Tomorrow will it come to pass? To believe that something will happen today and tomorrow because of what God said yesterday challenges our faith. Paul serves as a great example. In this instance of the sea voyage you may recall that at that portion in the book of Acts there is recorded the experience of Paul, when he was being taken as a prisoner from Asia Minor over to Rome, Italy, so that he could appear before the emperor in court. He had appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen. That was his privilege, and he had exercised it. So the authorities who were taking him, put him on a ship. It was against his personal advice. He reminded them that it was the wrong time of the year to try such a voyage, but it suited them to do so. When the south wind blew softly, they supposed that they had obtained their purpose, and they set sail and ran into a terrific storm. The storm was so bad that they had cast off all of the tackling of the ship and were so greatly distressed that all hope they would be saved was lost. After long abstinence Paul stood up before the crew members of that ship and spoke to them. "There stood by me this night the angel of God . . . saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar." (That is, God has something in mind for you, and since you are going to have to go to Rome to appear before Caesar, this ship is not going to be sunk and you are going to be spared.) So Paul, standing now talking to the pagan crew, can speak these bold words: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Oh, that every one of us as we think on these things, might be given the grace in our hearts to believe and to have confident expectation of the favorable outcome of what is going on right now! God has His

hand on these things, and He has His hand on everyone who believes in Him. If you put your trust in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, I can assure you that Almighty God will move all the forces of heaven on your side, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. I mean today and tomorrow. It shall be even as God told you.