

3. One Hope of Your Calling

Hope is one of the great, classical characteristics of the Christian life, a possession of those who have Biblical faith. Many non-religious people do of course express hope in all sorts of circumstances, but hope in a Biblical sense is far different from the flimsy, sometimes vain hopes expressed by people without Biblical faith. Biblical hope is a certain hope, with certain fulfilment, based primarily on the promises of the word of God, and realised in relationship with Jesus the Messiah. It is mentioned, for instance, by Peter in his first epistle,

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, to an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for you. (1Pet. 1:3,4)

This text from Peter makes some interesting points about Biblical hope: (1), it is a gift of God's mercy, granted to those who have been born-again to a living hope; (2), it is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and (3), it is to a heavenly, incorruptible inheritance. We will use these points as the basis for this short study on Biblical hope.

1. Begotten Again to a Living Hope

In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul includes in his prayer for the saints the request that, "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, ... you may know what is the hope of His calling" (Eph. 1:18). His prayer is for the redeemed, those who have trusted in Christ for salvation (Eph. 1:7; 12,13), and have left their old life sinful life behind, and are now living a new life of righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24). The old life is characterised by Paul as, "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12), but the saint has been called to a new life of hope. Paul relates that hope to the covenants of promise, and in reconciliation of relationship with God, all of which is made possible by the blood of the Messiah shed on the cross (Eph. 2:13-16).

Biblical hope is one of the "spiritual blessings in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3), possessed by those who have been born-again through faith in Jesus as their Saviour. As such, it can be known only by those whose spiritual eyes have been opened (Eph. 1:18), the unredeemed person does not know it, or understand it at all. It is called a living hope because while it is a hope for things which in this life are unseen, the fulfilment is certain (Rom. 8:23-25), and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the saint's life gives a guarantee of things to come (Eph. 1:13,14). There is a related "groaning" as the saint (who while experiencing the afflictions and constraints of this present life on earth, has the guarantee of freedom from affliction in the age to come) lives in anticipation of the fullness of redemption and the glories of eternity (Rom. 8:23).

2. Through the Resurrection of Christ Jesus

The fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a linchpin of Christian faith, indeed so

vital that Paul wrote that, “if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty ... if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile ...” (1Cor. 15:14;17). If Jesus had not risen from the dead, there would be no salvation, no gift of eternal life, and no living hope of life after death, but He is risen, and therefore the Christian hope is valid and real.

Paul noted the contrast between those “who have no hope” and those who “believe that Jesus died and rose again” (1Thess. 4:13,14): those without faith in Jesus have no certain hope of life beyond the grave, and no assured hope of reunion with those who have gone before them; while those who are in Jesus are fully convinced of their eventual meeting up with other believers beyond the grave, and of then being “always with the Lord” (1Thess. 4:17). For the believer the truth of Jesus’ resurrection is therefore a source of great comfort (1Thess. 4:18), there is freedom from the ignorance, sorrow and fear which is the lot of the unbeliever, who in the face of death, has “no hope” (1Thess. 4:13; Heb. 2:15).

3. A Heavenly Inheritance

The Christian Biblical hope is set on the unseen things of the kingdom of God, those things which are promised in His word but as yet remain unfulfilled. These are the things of eternity, “incorruptible and undefiled and reserved in heaven” (1Pet. 1:3), they are things of true value, the treasures in heaven which Jesus urged his disciples to seek after (Matt. 6:20). A brief list of things hoped for would include:

- Meeting with Jesus and other believers in the air at the rapture (1Thess. 4:13-18).
- Eternal life (Titus 1:2).
- The glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).
- The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18).
- The redemption of the body, i.e. freedom from the ageing process of this present life, and reception of a new incorruptible body (Rom. 8:23,24; 1Cor. 15:35-58; 2Cor. 5:1-4).
- A place prepared in the Father’s house (Jn. 14:2).
- New heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2Pet. 3:13), along with the corresponding absence of all things that may cause sorrow or pain (Rev. 21:4).

The Effect of Biblical Hope

The knowledge and experience of Biblical hope should have a marked effect on Christian life. The believer who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and has been born-again has been called by God to live a life of hope. We have seen that Biblical hope is focused on the coming things of the kingdom of God which are eternal and reserved in the heavens. In practical terms, this hope is manifest in the believer’s outlook and attitude to life in the present.

Hope Sustains the Walk of Faith

Chapter 11 of Hebrews starts with the statement that, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” there follows a list of Biblical examples of those who lived the

life of faith. For them, the promises of God were “afar off” but they “were assured of them and embraced them” (Heb. 11:13), and because of which they forsook the things of the world, set their desires on the things of heaven, and lived as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Many of them went through great trials, but were undeterred in their steadfast commitment to serve God and wait for the fulfilment of His promises.

Trials and tribulations will attend the Christian life; following Jesus is not an elixir for the end of all trials and tribulations, but Jesus’ disciples have the living hope of much better things to come (see Jn. 16:33). Trials can be managed much more easily when there is the certainty of something better on the other side of the trial, Jesus for example, seeing that there was joy beyond the agony of the cross, was able to endure (Heb. 12:2). The promises of God for the believer provide that certain hope of better things to come, and are a powerful source of spiritual sustenance when circumstances and situations get hard.

There is a uniting theme here, for those who set out on the walk of Biblical faith must, together with the saints of old and of present, accept affliction and the reproaches of Christ, be prepared to forsake all worldly treasures, and set their desires fully on the heavenly country. In doing so, they look unto Jesus, run their race with endurance, and patiently await the coming of His kingdom. United in their common hopes and outlook as they look to their heavenly home, such believers as these will seek to encourage and support one another in walking the narrow way of faith.

Hope Makes For a Joyful and Calm Assurance

Paul wrote, “hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given us” (Rom. 5:5), the born-again believer has the Holy Spirit in his or her heart acting as a guarantee of things to come (Eph. 1:13,14). It is part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to give a tangible ‘taste’ of heaven in the heart, that ‘taste’ is evident in the believers’ experience of such spiritual treasures as love, joy and peace, and also of the abiding presence of Jesus. The chorus of the hymn “I Serve a Risen Saviour” states of Jesus that, “He lives within my heart,” this experience of the divine presence ought to be part of the testimony of every believer, for it is “Christ in you” that is the “hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

The Holy Spirit in ministering the things of the kingdom of God to the believer, gives deep assurance of the reality of Biblical faith. This ministry of the Holy Spirit works spiritual comprehension of spiritual realities, and goes beyond mere intellectual assent, it provides steadfast conviction that all God’s promises are true, and all will be fulfilled (see Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21). The saints, being equipped with such understanding, are found to be “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation” (Rom. 12:12), as they serve God in this life, they do so with the happy anticipation of the fulfilling of His glorious promises in the age to come.

Hope Provides Testimony

Peter writing to suffering, persecuted saints advised that they, “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1Pet. 3:15). The suggestion is here that

even when Christians suffer, their hope remains evident in such a way, and to such an extent, that it causes the unbeliever to ask questions about that hope. There is something very unique in the way the Christian deals with suffering, for the Christian has a certain, living hope in God, and knows that God is with him, that God will bring him through, that God has a good purpose, and that at the end of it all is the wonderful promise of eternity with God in paradise. Paul expressed such hope in 2Corinthians 4:8-15 when he wrote, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed, we are perplexed, but not in despair ...” (v.8); he understood that in his hardships the life of Jesus was being manifested (v.11), and that God was working out a good purpose in the trials (v.15), and that in the end he would be raised up to be with Jesus and the saints eternally (v.14). Such confident hope is in very stark contrast to the unbeliever, who has no such hope, and may therefore be amazed at the Christian testimony, and desire for himself the same testimony of hope, the believer’s assurance therefore becomes an opportunity to witness and proclaim the gospel of salvation in Jesus.

A People United in Hope

The Lord calls His people to be a people with living hope, whose eyes are set on the things above, Paul sees that calling as a source of unity. Such people share a common longing for the unseen and eternal things of God’s kingdom. Like the saints of Hebrews 11, they disdain worldly pleasures and riches, preferring instead to wait for the fulfilment of the promises of God. Their hope is in God, and they trust Him to fulfil His promises, such hope is an anchor for the soul (Heb. 6:18,19), and the resulting steadfast confident outlook on life and death is witness to the reality of salvation, and of the Saviour Jesus. Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, they support and encourage one another as they run the race set before them (Heb. 12:1), and together they look forward to the day of the Lord’s appearing and eternal life in His righteous, perfect kingdom.

May the Lord grant us deep understanding and appreciation of the living hope which He gives to His people. And may our testimony of that hope lead others to desire for themselves the giver of that hope, the Lord Jesus Christ who is the hope of glory.

Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God. (Ps. 42:5, 11; 43:5)