

## **Christian Hope**

What is your hope for the future? Different people have different hopes and wishes. The one might hope to find a close friend, the other might hope to exercise more often and still another might hope that there will be a change in government. In our culture, the term “hope” basically refers to a wish for something which might happen or might not happen. We can have a hope that there will be good weather tomorrow but we don’t know for sure whether that will be the case. It is merely a hope.

Hope in the Bible has a very different character. Christian hope is closely related to faith and could be said to be a kind of faith, faith directed towards the future. When we hope for something in the Scriptural sense, then we have an expectation of something that is coming which we cannot yet see but which is based upon the promises of God. Scriptural hope is not simply a wish but it is more than that. It is the expectation of something that we can’t see yet but which we are sure is real and will come in its fullness.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews emphasizes the certainty of Christian hope in chapter 6 of his letter. He writes about how God made his promise to Abraham and underlined his promise with an oath. Even though it is impossible for God to lie, out of consideration for our weakness he confirmed his promise with an oath. God did this in order that those who believe him would be greatly encouraged in their faith and hope, the hope offered to them in the promises of God. And this hope is characterized in Hebrews 6 as “an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf” (Heb 6:19-20).

The image of an anchor is used to describe this hope. An anchor gives stability to a ship at sea and makes sure that it will not move from the place where it has to be. If the anchor is lifted up or removed, then the ship will drift away. So it is also with our souls and the hope which we may have based on Christ’s work. Our anchor is not cast into the bottom of the sea but we throw our anchor upward into the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus Christ is on our behalf. And that anchor is solidly in place there and it will never be moved. For Christ is in heaven, seated at God’s right hand and there he is interceding for us. After he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven in order to plead with God the Father for us. He has offered the only and perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of all of our sins and pleads with the Father on the basis of this sacrifice. God has accepted Christ’s sacrifice and therefore we know with a certainty that our salvation is sure.

Because of this certainty, later in his letter to the Hebrews, in chapter 10, the author exhorts believers, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Heb 10:23). Hold onto this hope without any wavering or swerving to the right or to the left. Persevere in this hope for the

long haul, not just in times of happiness and prosperity but also in times of sorrow and hardship. It is only when we hold onto Christ and the faith which we confess that we will arrive at the destination of the haven of God's everlasting peace and joy. It is only when we cling to Christ that we will experience the consolation and comfort of the forgiveness of all our sins and the sure hope of eternal life with God. May we as believers in Jesus Christ, encourage one another to continue in the path of a firm confidence in the Lord and his promises to us. For there is no one else to whom we can go in our time of need. There is no one else who can help us the way the Lord can. Therefore let us hold unswervingly to this hope which we profess.

What are the future promises of God which we are still expecting to be fulfilled? What are you looking forward to in your life with the Lord? What is the content of your hope? As we go through life, more and more people we know pass away and are no longer with us. What does the Christian faith tell us about them? Those who believe in Jesus Christ are never separated from God's love. They have a relationship with God which will last forever. Not even death, that enemy of us all, can separate us from God. And therefore the apostle Paul exhorts the Thessalonians in chapter 4 of his first letter to them that they do not need to grieve as those who have no hope. Rather they do have the hope of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who had died and rose again from the dead and therefore has defeated death. Those who believe in Christ participate in his victory over death. And so the death of believers is characterized as a mere sleeping, a slumber from which we will be awakened at the end of time, when Jesus Christ our Saviour returns on the clouds of heaven.

And the hope which we profess not only includes the salvation and life of souls but the complete renewal of the whole world. Everywhere we can see that the earth, nature is also suffering. We read in Romans 8 of the hope that "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). Now creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth and therefore this is groaning which is done in hope for something much better to come. The woman who groans in childbirth does so in the sure hope that a child is coming. This expectation of the child and of the end of the pain makes it possible to endure the pain. Now all creation and we as believers still suffer from the effects of sin but the hope of complete redemption and restoration is sure. It is sure because it is rooted in the work of Christ and the promises of God. Paul writes in Romans 8, "In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Rom 8:24-25). The sure hope of the Christian faith enables us to wait for the future with patience. It is not always easy to do so. Sometimes the pain and suffering of this present world can be overwhelming. Yet we go forward in faith and hope, knowing that God will fulfill his promises of the complete renewal of all things in his time.

We may go forward in hope, knowing that there are so many who have gone before us, who shared in the same hope and were faithful in resting in the Lord's word of promise. Abraham, the stranger in a foreign land, the dweller in tents, looked forward to the city whose builder and architect is God. We have received the promise in the book of Revelation of the new heaven and the new earth and new Jerusalem which will come down out of heaven. Then God will dwell with his people and they will see him and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Surely the day is coming when we will no longer need to live by faith but may live by sight instead. Then all those who have professed their faith and hope in him will receive the full gifts of their expectation, life eternal with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, a life without sin, a life with full joy that no one can take away from us. How wonderful that day will be and how we look forward to its coming! Hold unswervingly to this expectation and sure hope. In all things, remember that the hope of faith shall not deceive us for the Saviour's words are true and sure.