

IN CHRIST: SAVED BY HOPE

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Think with me about one of the most important words in our language. It is one of the most significant terms in the Christian religion. It describes a characteristic that we must not live without.

In Romans 8:18-25, Paul brings us to another great blessing of being in Jesus Christ. He mentions one of the most important words in the religion of Jesus Christ. It is a life changing word when it is a part of life. In Christ we have *hope*. Paul says, "We are saved by hope." Hope has something to do with our salvation.

Let us probe this term to see what it means to us, what its real significance is, and how it is attached to being in Christ.

I. THE POWER OF HOPE

Hope is a dynamic power that enables one to do almost unbelievable things. I am thinking of hope as a part of life, not just as religious hope. Many years ago the pilgrims came across the North Atlantic; they battled the storms of winter in those little ships. They made the journey and settled into this new land. Why did they brave those storms? Why did they risk their lives to come to the new land? It was because of hope for a better life in the new world.

In the early days of our country the pioneers moved westward. They crossed mountains, rivers, and plains. They suffered hardship. Many of them died. Many others reached their objective of arriving in the West. Why did they make those journeys? It was because of hope. They hoped that beyond those mountains, beyond the rivers, beyond the plains they would find a great meaning to their lives. The same is still true today. A

person is sick. Perhaps he may be hospitalized. He may have to undergo surgery. One of the great healing elements in his life will be his hope of getting better. I believe it goes without contradiction that sometimes sick people do not get well when they are sick because they give up hope. When they give up, they cannot win the victory.

Hope is one of the greatest thoughts that has ever entered our minds. A few years ago I saw a motion picture that has become one of my favorites. It was entitled "The Man from La Mancha." It told the story of Don Quixote. He was a rather crazy sort of a man. He lived one hundred years after the days of the knights who went forth in shining armor to conquer evil in the world. But he believed himself to be a knight. He was anything but a real knight; but he clothed himself in improvised armor. He had a rather silly person with him as his squire, and he went forth to conquer evil. In his journeys he came to a broken-down inn, an inn that was frequented by mule traders. He looked at the broken-down building and the proprietor of the inn. He called the proprietor the owner of a castle. He looked upon him as a nobleman. There was a poor girl who worked at that inn who was abused by every mule trader who came that way. Don Quixote looked upon her as a princess. As he went forth to conquer evil in the world, he wanted to wear her handkerchief, her colors. Nearly everybody believed that Don Quixote was crazy. But near the end of the story, as he lay near the point of death, those people whose lives had been affected by him came to his bedside and asked him to never change because they had

become, to some degree, what he had envisioned them as being. The point is this: The hopes and expectations of others inspire us to become more than we would have become otherwise. Hope is one of the greatest concepts that has ever entered our minds. It is a dynamic power that causes people to do almost unbelievable things.

In Romans 8, Paul speaks of hope in the context of the problems of human suffering. In verse 17 he said, "We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if we suffer with Him." Paul is focusing attention upon the world as it is, a fallen world, a world into which sin has come. As a result of the fall, as a result of sin, there is sickness, heartache, disappointment, and death in this world. Basically, suffering is in the world because the world has fallen. How is the man in Christ to deal with the world as it is? His disappointments? His physical pain and mental anguish? Death? Paul's word is "hope."

Notice what Paul says in verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." God has something better for His people than the suffering and heartache of this world. That something in the future is the object of the Christian's hope. But no sooner does Paul refer to the sufferings of this present time than he begins to mention what he calls the "whole creation." Notice what he says:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pain of childbirth together until now (8:19-22).

What does Paul mean when he talks about the whole creation groaning under the suffering and pain of this present world? Some believe Paul is talking about the trees, grass, flowers, and animals. It is true that at some point in time all suffering in the world, even to lower forms of life, will come to a close. But Paul does not have in mind those parts of nature which are separated from humanity. When he uses the word "creature" he uses the same term Jesus used when He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Jesus certainly did

not mean that the gospel should be preached to the animals and plants. It is the same word Paul used in Colossians 1:23 when he said that every creature under heaven had heard the word of truth. He is not talking about animals and plants. He is talking about every creature that makes up the human family. His point is that everyone, regardless of who he is, longs for a better life in another world. Everyone has some concept of life beyond this life. The Indians in the earlier days of our country had their happy hunting grounds in their thoughts. Man longs for a better tomorrow. Paul says that every man is groaning under the sufferings that the world brings and wants to be released from that suffering. However, Paul's major point has to do with the Christian and his hope. The man who is out of Christ does not live in hope. If he has a hope, it is a false hope because the hope of a better tomorrow belongs only to those who are in Christ.

II. THE OBJECT OF HOPE

Paul continues in 8:23: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." The whole family of man longs for a better tomorrow, but those who are in Christ know best of all that a better tomorrow is coming. We know it because we have the assurance of God Himself. The object of what we are looking forward to is the "redemption of our body." Paul is referring to the resurrection from the dead.

I believe in a bodily resurrection. Why? Because the Bible teaches the resurrection of the body; because Jesus Christ Himself has been raised. First Corinthians 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." All are going to be raised from the dead. The beautiful concept for the Christian is that those who are in Christ are to enjoy the final adoption, the redemption of the body. First Corinthians 15 is the great chapter on the bodily resurrection of the dead. In that chapter Paul shows that at some point this mortal will put on immortality, this corruptible shall put on incorruption. When this mortal shall put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Did you know that those who are in Christ will win the

ultimate victory even over death? Death is not the end; it is only a stage in the Christian's existence. He does not face death by himself. God will be with His children even in death and bring them safely through death to the other side.

What assurance do we have that we will be raised? We could say that our assurance is the promise of God; we could say our assurance is the fact that Christ has been raised. But in this context what is the assurance? Did you notice that in verse 23 Paul spoke of the first fruits of the Spirit? The Spirit of God is given to those who are obedient to God (Romans 5-8). Paul has previously emphasized the concept of God's Spirit being spread abroad in the hearts of those who are in Christ. Acts 5:32 says, ". . . so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." The first fruit is the giving of the Spirit to the Christian. The first fruit is the promise of an additional harvest that will come later. The additional harvest is the resurrection of the body. Our assurance is the Spirit, "the first fruits of the Spirit." God's Spirit is a down payment on blessings to be received in the future.

III. THE NATURE OF HOPE

What is hope? There are two elements in hope. One is desire; the other is expectation. A person can desire something and never achieve it. He can expect something that he does not desire. When he has hope he has both desire and expectation. The desire and expectation of the Christian is that there will be a resurrection of

the body in an eternal dwelling place with God. He desires it and expects it because God has promised it.

IV. THE RECIPIENTS OF HOPE

Who has hope? Who has hope for the future; who has hope for being raised, exalted, and glorified with God? The man out of Christ does not. Ephesians 2:12 speaks of those who live without Christ, as living without hope. That is one of the saddest thoughts that can ever enter our minds. *No hope. Out of Christ.* Christians who take their commitment to Christ lightly and never commit their lives to Jesus have no hope. The church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 was about to be spewed out of the mouth of Christ. Simply being a church member does not mean a person has hope. Who has hope? In Colossians 1:27 Paul said, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The Christian is in Christ. Romans 6 says he was baptized and that act put him into Christ (6:3). He has entered into Christ. Not only is the Christian in Christ, but Christ is in him. Christ's light is being reproduced in the life of a Christian. The Christian is seeking to think, talk, and act like Christ. As Christ is formed in the Christian, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

CONCLUSION

You can have that hope. But if you have hope it will be because you made the effort to enter into Christ and are daily developing into His image. It is a great concept. Those in Christ have hope for the future.

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