

A Living Hope - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The only hope for the Christian life is to focus on Christ and to bring Christ to others, for it is in Christ that we find true hope and salvation.

Duration: 46:27

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:14-15, Acts 2:36, Romans 10:14-15, Colossians 1:27, 1 Peter 1:3, Revelation 19:16

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the fundamental reality that Christ in us is the hope of glory. He acknowledges that even the best of human nature is flawed and cannot bring about true hope. The speaker highlights the example of the disciples, who despite their good intentions, failed and denied Jesus. He emphasizes that our hope lies not in ourselves, but in the work of grace and the presence of Christ within us. The sermon encourages listeners to focus on the smallest bit of Christ in others and to recognize the transformative power of God's grace.

Transcript

We return to the two passages of scripture around which our thoughts are circling at this time. The first letter of Peter, chapter 1, verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy beget us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. A living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The letter of Paul to the Colossians, chapter 1, verse 27. Whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you. The hope of glory.

While a very great deal of proof and evidence and material is drawn together to enforce the one fundamental reality, it is that reality upon which we must keep our eye and try not to lose it in the tremendous amount that gathers around it. But I feel quite sure, dear friends, that we will agree, and I trust very heartily agree when we close this gathering, that that which the Lord is bringing before us at this time is a, if not the, and I think we could say the most vital thing in the whole of the Christian life. The meaning, the reality and the meaning of those last words.

Christ in you. The hope. Glory.

So we are concerned at this time with Christ living, dwelling, growing within as the only hope for anything but the hope of God for everything. We, in the earlier meditation, sought to show how mightily this was proved in the experience of the first believers and the first apostles. As we saw firstly how the cross brought desolation to everything until Christ became an inward reality.

Indeed we could say that that is the very purpose of the cross on one side, to show the hopelessness of everything until Christ comes in, in a living way. We saw the hopelessness of a merely outward association with Christ as they spent their time with him in the days of his flesh. All the wonderful truth about him being right present with them.

The infinite truth of incarnation, God manifest in the flesh. The wonder of his personality, that divine personality which was all the time registering itself and yet not understood. But of which everyone was conscious.

The impress of a different and a superior kind of man, of humanity, of personality. The great fact that right in their midst through the whole time there was one who carried in her heart the secret of his birth, his miraculous birth. The fact of all his mighty miracles in every realm.

Then of his teaching which altogether confounded and defeated the best scholars of his day. They could never get equal with him, say nothing of defeating him. All that they had, with all that they were closely associated for that time.

And yet when the cross came, it completely shattered their faith, their hope, and they were all, the twelve, the seventy and all the others, scattered. Forsaking, fleeing, denying, as though all that went for nothing. Leaving the necessity for something in addition to that.

It proved valuable eventually, all of it, when that other something came. But it proved to be helpless for them in the day of the great ordeal. Because that other was not there and the other was Christ on the inside, Christ in you.

As we can say with Paul, Christ in you, the hope of glory, Christ not in you. With all this can only bring hopelessness. We went on to work, twelve and the seventy receiving a delegated authority and sent forth with that authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, raise the dead.

And so they did, came back rejoicing and proclaiming even that demons are subject unto us. Delegated authority, official power, and in the end, what? Again as though it all went for nothing, they are all scattered and peeled in the deepest doubt, uncertainty. Yes, being upbraided by Him for their unbelief, again and again, utterly without hope.

And the cross becomes an actuality until He came in and by the Holy Spirit took up residence within. And then it was different. Well, that far we went this afternoon with many more words.

We proceed this evening a little further with this matter. The hopelessness of human nature in itself. Now we look at these.

We don't know very much about the seventy. We know a little about some of the followers, like Mary Magdalene, know the Bethany family. Some others, just a little about them.

We know a good deal more about the twelve. As we were saying this afternoon, Peter always stands as a good representative of the others. Well, what was true of him was so true of them in many ways.

We look at them and there are a lot of good things about them. Quite a lot of good things about Simon Peter. I think in many ways a very lovable kind of man.

There's no doubt whatever that on the credit side there was a very warm heart there. And a warm heart for his master. There was real good intention.

Good intention people can, as we say, put their foot in it often. But good intention was there. He meant so well.

His motives were all the best. We could go on saying a lot of good things about him and about John. Perhaps you think you could say better things about John, about them all.

There's no doubt about it, there was a very good credit side to these people. They're no worse than we are. Perhaps in many ways a great deal better than some of us.

Human nature, the point is, human nature, not at its worst, but perhaps at its best, was represented by that company around the Lord Jesus. At all their faults. Sometimes they're blundering, yet not evil.

Nothing vice about them. Good, honest, open hearted men and women. In their intention and in a certain realm committed to Jesus.

And very thoroughly committed to Jesus. Sometimes breaking out in very strong affirmations and declarations of devotion and intention to go to death with him should it ever become necessary. Calvary, the cross.

Now, what's the real truth? What is the real eternal value of it all? How much of it will go through, survive and triumph? Not one bit, not one bit. We see the desolation of all their protestations, all their confessions, all their declared good intentions, all their professions of love, devotion, faithfulness, lying in ruins. The most representative is denying repeatedly with oaths and with curses he has any knowledge of this Galilean.

We needn't say any more. The utter hopelessness of human nature in itself. Where could hope be found? Would there ever be hope again? Will hope rise out of those ashes? Is it gone forever? Is it finally and eternally hopeless? Yes, if it's left to them.

If they're left to themselves. Where will hope be? Not in themselves, but in Christ in them. That will be the hope of glory, change, transfigured outlook, shame, shame, remorse, reproach, glory.

And let us be very, very clear about this, dear friends, because it's just at this very point that you and I need to learn all our lessons over again. The hope will never be found in ourselves. Even when we are Christians.

Even though we go right on as far as any Christians can go, should he leave us for five minutes, it's as hopeless as it was before ever we started. In me, and it's an apostle, and a mature, experienced apostle, that is speaking in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. There's no hope there.

Christ in you, the hope, and the only hope. 2 Corinthians 5 contains the very foundation of any hope. Where a man is concerned.

The love of Christ, the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge. One died in the place of all, therefore all died. They which live should henceforth live no longer unto themselves, but unto him who in their place died and rose again.

No, we know man after the flesh. Wherefore if any man be in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things are passed away, or they become new, but all things are out from God.

The way of hope. Yes, through the devastation of the cross, up into the resurrection where it is Christ. The center and the circumference of a new creation.

A new creation, that's it. So, there is no hope whatever. Absolutely no hope in man naturally.

I say we've got to learn that lesson all over anew, because you're always, always trying to find hope in yourself. That's your trouble. It's your trouble.

Shall I put it another way? Your trouble is that you can't find any hope in yourself, and the fact that you're troubled about that shows that you want to. You haven't given yourself up. God gave you up in the cross of Jesus Christ as a hopeless mess, and shown by that very cross how hopeless we are.

But in raising Jesus from the dead, taking him up, and then sending him as in the Holy Spirit to dwell within, God started a new basis of hope. It is never in us. It is in Christ.

It never will be in us. We'll be as hopeless at the end as we were at the beginning. It will always be in Christ.

Friends, we've got to make everything of Christ. Far more than we have. Far more than we have.

Oh, that we could free ourselves from that old ground of expectation where we are concerned. We could quit it and get positively onto the ground of Christ. Christ my hope.

With both hands I lay hold on Christ. Christ only. But he is the hope of glory.

That is, as to our self-worn attitude, we've got to take God's position about ourselves. God's position about ourselves is it has nothing to do with us. He has only to do with his Son.

Now, here opens a very large field of perplexing experience. And it is interpreted by this one truth. And this one key opens the door to so much.

Why does the Lord ignore so much of our prayer? And why does the Lord not come onto the ground that we try to get him to come onto? Why do we not find the Lord with us in much crying, beseeching, entreating? He doesn't answer. Doesn't move. Why? The answer, dear friends, the explanation is usually that we're on the wrong ground.

We are taking account of things that God has finished with long ago. We are wanting to get God onto ground that he's abandoned forever. You will only have the Lord, or we shall only have the Lord with us at all while we keep on the ground of Christ.

Make no mistake about it. You've got to find out whether that's Christ's ground, or your ground, or other people's ground. The ground of human judgments, human interpretations, human feelings, human desire, that which is natural.

If that ground is the ground on which we are trying to get the Lord to encamp and do something, he'll be silent. And silent forever. He'll not move him.

One thing about God is that he is a realist. A realist. And if he says in the cross, I close the door forever to the natural man, you'll never get him opening that door again.

Not a bit. Break your heart in prayer to get him to move and to act. He won't do it.

Only on one ground, that's the ground of his son. Can you provide the ground of Christ? Then you will find the door open with God. And he's coming through.

That's his only ground. It will be despair and hopelessness until we can get clean through onto pure Christ ground. And then it's an open heaven.

It's an open heaven. It's release. I said that opens a very big field.

You see, it opens the field of the whole of the Bible. Carry this conference right on for the next two or three years with our Bible in hand on this one thing only. On this one thing only.

I would ask you to take this as the key to your New Testament. Make no mistake about it, this is the key to the New Testament. It is of the old, of course.

But in spiritual reality, every book of the New Testament must be read in the light of this. Christ as God's ground. And God's ground of hope alone.

You see, that passes from the individual to the collective. Oh, we haven't learned much yet of this. I am aware, dear friends, that this is perhaps the most difficult thing in the whole Christian life.

For all of us, every one of us. And in this I am the most backward of the pupils. We will not get anywhere with one another in our relationship as the Lord's people if we are going to keep on the natural ground of one another.

You are judging me according to what I am naturally. Taking account of me because of what you see I am just as a man in myself. You will have all the ground for despair that ever you can want.

And I'll do the same where you're concerned. I'll have to give you up. There's no hope.

There's no hope. Some of us, of course, are unable to see all the frailties and faults of others. And where does it lead? Despair, doesn't it? Deadlock? No way through.

No future. No promise. The Lord is not with us in that.

Henceforth know we no man after the flesh. What is the henceforth since all died? All died? Ah, this lesson for us all is just this. To take account of the minutest bit of Christ that there is in another.

Focus upon that. The work of grace. Go as far as you can, even if it's only in a sort of negative way and say, well, what would they be but for the grace of God? But go further and say, see what the grace of God

has done.

Now, that's the only way of hope. Christ. Christ in you.

Now, do you see what that leads to? Oh, dear friends, it does mean what this New Testament is all about. That we've got to provide one another with a great deal more of Christ in ourselves. For hope.

There's got to be a continual increase of Christ. A continual increase of the work of grace in us. The grace of the Lord Jesus.

It's the only way. So, as I've said the whole of the New Testament is about this first. Christ must get inside.

And then Christ must grow inside. Until, until. Will it ever be there is more of Christ than there is of ourselves? But that's the way.

The apostles who, as we said this afternoon, were so meticulous and particular about this matter of converts receiving the Holy Spirit as a definite, positive, concrete experience at crisis were just as particular in all their teaching that not only should the Holy Spirit have been received but that they should be filled with the Spirit. Filled with the Spirit. Be filled with the Spirit.

It's only the other way of saying Christ is in but Christ has got to be fully formed within. More and more. It is a very practical school, isn't it? Very hard lessons.

But does it not explain much? Yes, it does. It's the heart and the core of true spiritual Christianity. Christ.

Only Christ. The Alpha, the Omega. Beginning, the end, and all between.

A few words before we go on just another point. The hopelessness of the kingdom until the King is within. How much we could say about the hopes, the expectations concerning the kingdom that filled the hearts of every true, the heart of every true Israelite.

And as we know, these disciples and apostles were very true representatives of Israel's hopes for the kingdom. They cherished that hope. They built everything upon that hope.

All their thoughts, their mentality was concerning the kingdom. Indeed, their very committal to Christ, leaving all things to follow Him had the kingdom in view, as its motive. Right up to the last minutes, we might say, before He went to glory.

There, I was going to say, obsessed with this kingdom matter. Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? The last words to Him on record before He went. But what about the effect of the cross upon all that? Yes, the cross, the crucifixion shattered all their hopes of the kingdom.

We had trusted that it had been He. We had trusted that it had been He that would restore the kingdom. And here, their kingdom lies waste.

And all their hopes, so far as He was concerned, and the kingdom, were shattered. Just scattered like dust to the wind. Where is the kingdom now? What's the hope of the kingdom now? Hopelessness of the kingdom came back when He came in.

That is what Peter is talking about. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead unto an inheritance.

Not to crumble again to the dust of inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that faded not away, reserved in heaven, is the kingdom visioned with its back.

On what ground? Christ, the King, with Him. That was Peter's note on the day of Pentecost. That was the preaching of the first preachers, Jesus Christ is Lord, His Lord.

God hath made Him both Lord and Christ. That was Peter's note on the day of Pentecost. That was the preaching of the first preachers, Jesus Christ is Lord, His Lord.

God hath made Him both Lord and Christ. King of kings and Lord of lords. There's only that hope for the kingdom.

But that's perhaps speaking in large terms, you see. What I'm talking about is the preaching. The preaching.

The preaching of the kingdom, yes. If you like to alter the phraseology and say, preaching for man's salvation, that's the kingdom. It's called evangelization.

But here we've missed the point so much. What is evangelization? What is preaching the kingdom? What is preaching the gospel? What is it? Is it just and only announcing certain truths? Certain facts or certain doctrines? Is it? No. According to the true meaning of the very words themselves, it is bringing Christ.

Bringing Christ. Not only speaking about Him, preaching concerning Him, it is bringing Him. There is no hope unless you bring Christ.

Your preaching has got to bring Christ. Your evangelization has got to bring Christ. It's not to be something in itself.

Christ has got to come in it. And therefore, therefore, can you not see, dear friends, why at the beginning the demand was that they should preach with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? What is that? It is nothing other than Christ coming in, in power, in presence, in presence. If you and I cannot bring Christ to the unsaved, we can preach until we are blue in the face, and it will have no effect.

You've got to bring Christ to them, into their presence. They have got to meet Christ when we preach. Sense Christ.

Preaching must be by the Holy Spirit within. Why so much preaching is ineffective? Not in the power of the indwelling Spirit. That is not just a criticism.

It's a challenge. Salvation rests on that ground. The hope for men's salvation rests upon the ground that we bring Christ to men.

I know it's bringing the gospel, the good news, but it's with that bringing the person by the Spirit and in the Spirit. Churches are only born by Christ being introduced. He is the seed.

The living seed out of which the organism grows. You cannot found and form churches from the outside, collect people and call the collection a church. That's not the New Testament way at all.

Every body of believers in any place has got to be the embodiment of Christ. One reality is not their teaching or their manner of procedure, but that Christ is met, is found, is there. There's no doubt about it

that Christ is in the midst.

Those people have Christ. You meet them, you meet Christ. When you go amongst them, you find Christ.

Christ is in their life. Christ governs their life. He governs their business.

He governs their hope. He governs their relationships with one another. It's Christ.

The only hope for churches to come into being, Christ is brought. And it's the only ground and way of believers being built up and growing. If we just grow ourselves, it would be an awful thing that grows.

Tragedy is so often that there is fear and the interest of God is made the playground for the flesh to inflate itself and display itself and strut up and down. No? Spiritual growth, you can understand this, is not our growth in that sense that we, in what we are growing. Spiritual growth is just the increase of Christ in us.

That's perhaps too simple a thing to say. But what I'm saying in all this, you see, in all this, is one thing, Christ. Only Christ.

The only hope from beginning to end in any phase or stage or form is Christ risen, changed, the scene of desolation and devastation which meets our eyes after the cross, changed that and gave a new hope, gave a new hope when he came back in the Spirit and entered in and began the realization of the hope. That's what we have, isn't it, in the New Testament. The hope brought in with the resurrection and then a proceeding to the fulfillment of the hope.

If we read the book of the Acts, so-called, it's the hope working out, isn't it? The hope in progressive fulfillment. Well, dear friends, that's where I'm closing this evening unless it is to underline or reemphasize this one thing. As we theologically distinguish the persons of the Trinity, we do not divide between Christ and the Holy Spirit in work, in nature.

Therefore, when we speak about Christ in you, we mean the Holy Spirit within. When we speak of the Holy Spirit dwelling within, we mean Christ within. It's what the Holy Spirit himself means.

What Jesus himself meant when he said, he shall not speak of himself. He shall take the things which are mine, show them to you. They work together in such complete identity that you cannot distinguish between them.

Though Christ remains at the Father's right hand, he is here in you, in us, by the Holy Spirit. Now, my final emphasis is upon this. Our need to be very sure about this matter of the indwelling Spirit, which is the indwelling Christ.

I know all the things that are going to arise around us. Know what questions you could begin at once to fire at me about all this matter of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and so on. I'm not surprised that the devil has supremely confused this whole thing and brought it under reproach.

Not surprised. The devil at least knows a good thing when he sees it. He knows values when he comes into touch with them.

And this is the matter upon which everything hangs. But, leaving all interpretations apart, all questions, let us come down to the fact that you and I must, in our Christian life, know two things. Our death with Christ to the old man.

And, through that, Christ within. The Holy Spirit within. Starting on heavenly ground only and entirely ignoring all earthly ground.

Going on on heavenly ground. That's the way of the Spirit. Oh, let us learn or seek to learn this lesson.

Don't want to throw you into the vortex of great confusion or questions as to whether you've ever received the Holy Spirit because of this or that or something else about manifestations. Don't be troubled about that. You can know, listen to me, you can know that Christ is in you.

You can know that the Holy Spirit is in you by a thousand spiritual evidences without any of those manifestations that some people say are the essential proof of the Holy Spirit. I mean of tongues and such like. No, they are not essential to the fact and reality of the Holy Spirit being within and filling.

They are not. It's the reality that you and I need. Not some particular kind of sensations.

And demonstrations. And noises. And what not.

It's the deep reality that Christ is in us. And there is our hope. Our hope of glory.

Our only hope of glory, but our true hope of glory.

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