

The Sacred Anchor

by Thomas Watson

A Christian's hope is in the future, specifically in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Proverbs 10:28, Romans 5:2, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 1:27, 2 Thessalonians 2:16, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 3:6, 1 Peter 1:3, 1 John 3:3, Revelation 22:12

Topics: "Eternal Hope", "Christian Joy"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the Christian's chief happiness being in the future, looking for the blessed hope of heaven. He emphasizes the act of 'looking' with desire, joy, and patience, and delves into the nature of hope as a supernatural grace planted by God. Watson explains the difference between hope and faith, highlighting the importance of a well-built hope that is quickening, purifying, good, and persevering. He contrasts the hope of a believer with that of a wicked person, urging Christians to maintain their hope against discouragements and to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Transcript

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

A Christian's chief happiness is in in the future. A saint in this life, is an expectant of heaven; he has little in hand--but much in hope. So says the text, "looking for that blessed hope." There is enough to make us breathe after that hope, if we look either internally or externally.

Internally, if we turn our eyes inward and behold our sins. This made Paul himself cry out, "O wretched man that I am!" Romans 7:24. A Christian has two men within him--flesh and spirit. This may make him look for that blessed hope--when he shall be disentangled of his sins, and shall be as the angels of God.

If we look externally, if we cast our eyes abroad, the world is but our sojourning-house. It is a stage whereon vanity and vexation act their part, and the scene seldom alters. "Arise and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted!" Micah 2:10. All which considered, may make us look for "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ."

In which words there is the act, "looking," and the object, which is set down emphatically, "that blessed hope" and, specifically, "the glorious appearing of the great God."

I begin with the first, the act, "looking." There is a threefold looking:

1. There is a looking with DESIRE--as the servant looked for the year of jubilee and release, Leviticus 25:40, or as the bride looks for the marriage day. Now is a time of absence from our husband Christ; therefore, we are dressed in mourning and hang our harps upon the willows. But how the spouse desires the marriage day when the nuptials shall be solemnized! At that wedding, "the water shall be turned into wine." How the pious soul cries out in a holy pang of desire, "How long Lord! Why is Your chariot so long a-coming? Why do the wheels of Your chariot tarry?" It is the desire of the whole church, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly." Revelation 22:17.

2. There is a looking with JOY. Romans 5:2, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." There is terror in a sinner's looking; it is called a fearful looking for of judgment, Hebrews 10:27. A man in debt looks every hour when the sergeant shall arrest him--but the saint's looking is a joyful looking, as a man looks for a friend, or for one that is to pay him a great sum of money. So Moses looked with joy "to the recompense of reward," Hebrews 11:26.

3. There is a looking with PATIENCE--as a man casts his seed into the earth, and looks with patience until the crop springs up. James 5:7, "Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near." So much for the act, looking.

The second is the object, "that blessed hope", where we are to consider what hope is--and what a Christian hopes for.

What is hope? I answer, hope is a supernatural grace planted in the heart by the Spirit of God, whereby a Christian is quickened to the expectation of those things which are held forth in the promise. Romans 8:25, "If we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience." Aquinas describes hope thus, "Hope is concerned with a good that is hard to reach, located in the future, and open to be gained."

Hope is concerned with a good. It looks at some good, so it differs from fear. Fear looks at evil, hope at good.

Hope is concerned with a future good. It looks at some good to come; so it differs from joy. Joy is exercised about something present, hope about something future.

Hope is concerned with a good that is hard to reach. It looks at some good which is difficult to attain; so hope differs from desire. Desire is weak and transient; it is soon over. Hope is resolute and fixed, it wrestles with difficulties and will not give up, until it has the thing hoped for.

Hope is concerned with a good that is open to be gained. It looks at some good which is feasible, and which there is possibility of obtaining; so hope differs from despair. Despair looks on things with black spectacles and gives all up as lost. Hope is like cork to the net, which keeps the heart from sinking in despair. Thus you have seen what hope is.

QUESTION. How does hope differ from faith?

ANSWER. These two graces, faith and hope, are so alike that they have been taken one for the other. There is such a near affinity between them that, as Luther said, it is hard to find a difference. But, though they are placed near together like the two wings of the cherubim on the mercy-seat, they are not the same. Indeed, in some things faith and hope do agree. Both feed upon the promise; both help to support the soul in trouble. Faith and hope are like two buoys put under a Christian which keep him from sinking in the waters of affliction. Both of these graces, like medicinal water, comfort the fainting soul. There is joy in believing, Romans 15:13; and rejoicing in hope, Romans 5:2. Faith and hope, like those two golden pipes, Zachariah 4:12, empty their golden oil of joy into a Christian; but, though in some things these two graces agree and are alike--yet in some things they differ.

Faith and hope differ in order and priority. Faith precedes and goes before hope. Faith is the mother grace. Faith is the ground of things hoped for, Hebrews 11:1. The promises are precious. They are like the ark which had manna laid up in it; but we must first believe the things contained in the promise, before we hope for them. Therefore, Jerome said well, "Faith lights the lamp of hope as the fire of the altar lit the lamps of the sanctuary." Thus these graces differ in priority; hope is the daughter of faith.

They differ in their nature, and that two ways:

Hope only looks forward at things to come; faith looks backward as well as forward. It looks at things past as well as future. Faith believes Christ's death and resurrection, as well as His coming to glory.

Hope looks at the excellency of the promise; faith looks at the certainty of the promise. Hope reads over the writing of the promise; faith looks at the seal of the promise. Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie has promised." That which hope looks at, is eternal life; that which faith looks at is the infallibility of the promise: God who cannot lie has promised. In a word, faith believes, hope waits. Faith shows a Christian the land of promise; hope sails there with patience. Thus you see how faith and hope differ--but these twins must not be parted. Faith strengthens hope and hope comforts faith, as an elm supports the vine, and the vine loads the elm with its fruit. Faith is the cable--and hope the anchor, and both these help to keep the soul steady so that it does not dash upon rocks or sink in the quicksands. This much for the first, what hope is.

What a Christian hopes for. Emphatically, he looks for "that blessed hope." Hope here is used as a figure for the things hoped for. That blessed hope, is the hope of blessedness. A Christian's hope is not in this life; then he would have forlorn hope. There is nothing here to be hoped for but vicissitudes. All the world rings changes--but we are looking for that blessed hope. This is the difference between the seaman's anchor and the believer's anchor. The seaman casts his anchor downwards; the believer casts his anchor upwards in heaven, looking for that blessed hope. The believer is a rich heir, Hebrews 6:17, and he waits until the royal crown shall be set upon his head.

According to our common law, there are two sorts of free-holds. There is a free-hold in deed and a free-hold in law. A free-hold in deed, is when a man has made an entrance upon lands and tenements, and has actually seized them. A free-hold in law, is when a man has right to lands--but has not yet made actual entrance upon them. Heaven is a believers free-hold in law; he has a right to it. It is promised by the Father; it is purchased by the Son; it is assured him by the Holy Spirit. He does not have the free-hold in deed--but waits God's leisure, and looks for that blessed hope until the time comes that he shall actually enter upon possession of the inheritance.

The object of a Christian hope is set down specifically--"the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Here, by the way, the Deity and Godhead of Christ is strongly proved from hence against the Arians. The Apostle shows who this great God is. It is, he says, "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ". To speak, then, of the object of a Christian's hope set down here specifically, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior.

There is a threefold appearing of Christ.

1. There is an appearing of Christ TO us; as when He was incarnate. Isaiah 9:6, To us a child is born. This was a happy appearing when this morning star appeared. Salvation appeared to mankind when Christ took flesh, He married our human nature to the divine nature. The virgin's womb was the place consecrated for tying that knot. Great is the mystery--God manifest in the flesh, 1 Timothy 3:16. It is such an enigma, as the angels adore, 1 Peter 1:12. God said, "the man has become as one of us," Genesis 3:22--but now we may say, "God Himself has become as one of us, in the likeness of men," Philippians 2:7. This was Christ's first appearing.

2. There is an appearing of Christ IN us, that is, when He appears in our hearts, which is called forming Christ in us, Galatians 4:19. Christ is said to appear in us when, by the operation of His grace, He transforms us into His own image. In the incarnation, Christ made Himself like us. By sanctification, He makes us like Him--holy as He is holy. What are we the better for Christ's appearing in our flesh--unless He appears in our hearts? What are we the better for a Christ outside us--unless we have a Christ within us? Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

3. There is an appearing of Christ FOR us, and that two ways:

First, Christ appears for us as an ADVOCATE. Hebrews 9:24, "He is entered into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us." It is a metaphor borrowed from our law courts where the attorney pleads for the client. So Christ pleads as an advocate for the saints. Satan is the accuser--but Christ is the advocate. He answers all charges brought in, and He appears, says the Apostle, in the presence of God for us. The high priest, under the law, appeared before the ark and the mercy-seat, which was but a type of God's presence; but Christ appears in the very presence of God for us--in the face of God. He spreads His merits before His Father and, in the virtue of His bloody sufferings, pleads for mercy for us. And if Christ appears for us in heaven, shall not we appear for Him upon earth?

Second, Christ appears for the saints as a JUDGE, and this appearing is meant in the text, "looking for the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Christ's first appearing in the flesh was dark and obscure. His beauty was veiled over, Isaiah 53:2. All who saw the man--did not see the Messiah. But His second appearing as our judge will be a glorious appearing, like the sun breaking out of a cloud. It will be a glorious appearing both in respect of Christ and the saints.

First, it will be a glorious appearing in respect of CHRIST Himself, and that three ways:

1. His PERSON will be glorious. That light which shone upon Paul, surpassing the glory of the sun, Acts 26:13, was but a glimpse of Christ's beauty, like a spark of the sun of righteousness. What will it be, when He shall appear in all His spiritual embroidery?

2. His THRONE will be glorious. He shall sit upon the throne of His glory! Matthew 25. He shall have His chair of state set Him more rich than ivory or pearl, a throne more brilliant and magnificent.

3. His ATTENDANTS shall be glorious. Matthew 25:31, "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him." The angels are the courtiers of heaven. They are compared to lightning, Matthew 28:3, in regard of their sparkling luster, and these glorious spirits shall be Christ's attendants, part of Christ's retinue, accompanying Him to His throne. Thus it will be a glorious appearing in regard of Christ.

Second, it will be a glorious appearing in regard of the SAINTS. Christ will appear to do three things:

1. Christ as a judge will appear to acquit His people, and that is by pronouncing the sentence, "Come you who are blessed of My Father." The debt-book shall be crossed in the blood of the Lamb!

2. Christ as a judge will appear to vindicate His people. The names of the godly, many times, lie buried in reproach; but at that day, they shall, as Bernard said, "Be fragrant with the finest perfumes." Christ will give them a new name. He will call them His friends, His spouse, the apple of His eye. Their names shall flourish with honor and give forth their perfume as the wine of Lebanon.

3. Christ as a Judge will appear to crown His people when body and soul shall be reunited and perfected in glory. Christ will take His people into His sweet and everlasting embraces. He will lay them in His bosom; He will set them upon His throne; He will fill them with the inebriating wine of His love to all eternity!

And thus you see what is the saint's hope, namely the glorious appearing of Christ, when He shall appear as a Judge to acquit, vindicate, and crown them!

See here the misery of a wicked man who has all his hope in this life. He makes the wedge of gold his hope; he casts his anchor downwards. He can have no hope of Christ's appearing; he fears Christ's appearing. He does not hope for it; he is like a prisoner who fears the judge's coming to the bench. Christ's appearing will be a dismal appearing to him. When Christ shall appear, "what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 1 Peter 4:18.

A wicked man is like a mariner at sea, who has no anchor; like a man in a storm, who has no shelter. Where is his hope when he shall come to die? It is with a sinner as it was with the old world when the flood came. The water rose higher and higher by degrees. First, the waters came to the valleys--but they fled to the hills; then the waters came to the mountains. Yes--but there might be some trees upon the hills, and they would climb up to them. Then the waters prevailed and rose to the top of the trees. Now they had nothing to trust in; all hopes of being saved were gone.

So it is with a sinner. If one comfort is taken away, he has another left. If a relation is gone, he has an estate left; if one crutch is broken--yet he has another to lean upon. Yes--but sickness comes, and he sees he must die and appear before his Judge. Now he has no hope. He dies despairing; he must lie forever in the boiling furnace of God's wrath!

Put yourselves upon the trial: Do you have this blessed hope of Christ's appearing, and of your appearing with Him in glory? Come almost to any man, and you shall hear him say that he hopes to be saved. Well, then, let every soul put itself upon the TRIAL.

1. True hope is QUICKENING. It sets a man to working for heaven. It is called a living hope, 1 Peter 1:3. It puts life into a man. Hope is a spur to duty, a whetstone to industry. Hope of victory makes the soldier fight; hope of gain makes the merchant industrious. Divine hope is as wind to the sails, as wheels to the

chariot; it makes a Christian active in piety. He runs the ways of God's commandments. Hope cuts away through rock; it wrestles with difficulties; it despises dangers; it marches in the face of death! True hope never gives over until it has the thing hoped for. He who has divine hope will have Christ, though it is in a furnace. He will profess the truth, though the next word is "Christians, to the lions."

The Romans, as Tertullian observes, would endure all kind of hardships. They would fight with cold and hunger, and run hazard for hope at last to be consul, which was an honor but for a year. Oh, then, what pains will he take who has hopes of heaven, where he shall be crowned with a garland of glory forever! Does that man say his hope is in God who stands all the day idle? Proverbs 19:24. There is a faint desire in hypocrites. They would like to be saved--but sit still and do nothing. Their hope is not a living hope--but a dead hope. True hope is in the soul like fire, which is an active element: it is ever sparkling or flaming.

2. True hope is PURIFYING. 1 John 3:3, "He who has this hope in Him, purifies himself." Hope is in the soul as lightning is in the air; it clears the air. He who has hope in Christ, sets himself against all sin, both in purpose and practice. He is a consecrated person. There is engraved upon his heart, "Holiness to the Lord!" Hope is a virgin grace; it lives in a soul. Benard compares holiness to the root--and hope to the branch. True hope flourishes upon the root of holiness.

Now, then, try your hope by this Scripture touchstone. The hypocrite says he has hope--but is he a purified person? What! an unclean person--and he hopes to go to heaven? Nothing enters there which defiles, Revelation 21:27. What! a drunkard and he hopes to be saved? Do you think to go reeling to heaven? What! an apostate and yet hope to be saved? As if there were any going to heaven backward. The wicked man is not sure of happiness--yet remains carnally secure.

3. A true hope is a GOOD hope. 2 Thessalonians 2:16, "Who has given us good hope through grace." A wicked man's hope is as far from being good, as his heart. The Hebrew word for hope signifies both confidence and folly; it is fitly applied to a wicked man's hope. His confidence is folly. The hope of a godly man is compared to an anchor, Hebrews 6:19; the hope of a wicked man is compared to a spider's web, Job 8:14.

The sinner's hope, on the other hand, is fitly compared to a spiders web three ways:

1. The spider's web has no foundation. Such is the hope of the wicked; it is a pleasing thing--but it has nothing solid to rest upon. A godly man's hope is built upon a double basis.

The hope of a godly man is built upon the Word of God. Psalm 130:5, "In His word do I hope." The Word says, "Let the sinner forsake his ways," and the Lord will "abundantly pardon." The Word says, "And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." 1 John 3:8. Now a child of God, finding these qualifications wrought in him, builds his hope for heaven upon them. In His Word do I hope.

The hope of a godly man is built upon biblical experience. Romans 5:4, "Experience works hope." A believer can bring a catalogue of experiences; Psalm 119:65, "You have dealt well with your servant." So can a believer say, "God has dealt well with me." In several cases, he has had experiences of God. When his sins and temptations have been strong, God has come in with auxiliary forces, and His grace has been sufficient. When his heart has been sinking under fears, God has buoyed him up out of quicksands and lifted up his head out of deep waters. Psalm 3:3, "You are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head." When his heart has been dead in duty, the Spirit of God has been sweetly tuning his soul, and now he makes melody in his heart to the Lord, Ephesians 5:19.

A godly man has many signal experiences of God's favor to him, and experience breeds hope. So that a godly man's hope has a foundation; it is a well-built hope. That hope must stand strong which stands with one foot upon a promise--and with the other foot upon an experience. But a wicked man's hope is a spiders web. He has nothing to ground his hope upon; his hope is an imposture, a golden dream. Isaiah 29:8, "A hungry person dreams of eating but is still hungry. A thirsty person dreams of drinking but is still faint from thirst when morning comes."

The hope of a sinner is like a dying man's will that has neither seal set to it nor witnesses. In the will, he promises to bequeath such a manner and lordship, so many thousands to such a one; but the will, being without seal and witnesses, is null and void in law. Just such is the hope of a wicked man. His hope promises him great matters--that Christ is his, and all the privileges of heaven are his; but, alas, it is a mere delusion of his false heart! When things come to be examined, he lacks both seal and witnesses; he lacks the seal of the Word to confirm his title, and the witness of the Spirit. This is a sad thing--for a man to go to hell with the hope of heaven!

2. The spider spins the web out of her own bowels; she fetches all from herself. The bee fetches all from outside herself; she sucks honey from the flower. The spider fetches all from within herself. A true Christian, like the bee, fetches all from outside himself. He sucks from the sweet flower of Christ's righteousness. Isaiah 45:24, "In the Lord, I have righteousness and strength." But a wicked man, like the spider, fetches all his hope from within. He spins the thread of his hope out of himself--from his duties and moralities; thus his hope is like the spiders web.

3. The spider's web is but weak; the least blast shakes it; the least touch breaks it. Such is the sinner's hope: the least terror of conscience shakes it. Job 8:14, "whose hope shall be cut off." Commonly, before a wicked man's life is cut off, his hope is cut off. The godly man's hope is a good hope. It is solid and Scriptural; the other is a spider's web.

4. A true hope is a PERSEVERING hope. Hebrews 3:6, "Whose house are we--if we hold fast the confidence of hope firm unto the end." Hope makes us endure: therefore, it is compared to an anchor which holds the ship in a storm, and to a helmet, 1 Thessalonians 5:8. The helmet keeps off the blow of the sword or arrow from entering. So hope is a helmet keeps off the stroke from a Christian so that it shall not hurt or dismay him. In time of public calamities, hope keeps the soul from sinking. Joel 3:16, "The Lord's voice will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem, and the earth and heavens will begin to shake. But to his people, the Lord will be a welcoming refuge and a strong fortress." Though heaven and earth are ready to come together--yet a believer's hope abides.

A believer never casts away his anchor. The Jews were prisoners in Babylon--yet prisoners of hope, Zachariah 9:10, "Turn to your stronghold, you prisoners of hope." When a Christian is on his deathbed, and all hope of life is taken away--yet his hope in God is not taken away.

What unspeakable comfort is this to a child of God, who, upon a serious trial, finds he has a well-built hope. When Christ shall appear, it will be a glorious appearing to a believer. A Christian is like a rich heir who has great lands in reversion; he has much in hope.

Alexander, having given away almost all he had in Greece, and being asked what he had left for himself answered, "Hope." His meaning was, that he hoped to conquer more kingdoms, as afterwards he did. So, if a Christian's outward comforts were taken away, and one should ask him what he had left, he might say, "the anchor of hope." He has a confident hope of those eternal mansions which

Jesus Christ has gone to prepare for him, John 14:2. When Christ, who is his life, shall appear, then shall he also appear with Him in glory, Colossians 3:4. Oh, what comfort is this; how may this lighten and sweeten the cross! After the bitter waters of Marah, comes the wine of paradise! After a wet spring comes a joyful harvest!

Be exhorted to cheerfulness. Romans 5:2, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Fear begets sorrow; hope begets joy. Divine hope, said Augustine, cannot be without some mixture of joy. Does a Christian have hopes of heaven--and will he not rejoice? Proverbs 10:28, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness."

OBJECTION. But may some say, "It is long before we shall enter upon possession of heaven, and hope deferred makes the heart sick." Proverbs 13:12.

ANSWER. It is not long. Revelation 22:12, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with Me." This glorious reward we hope for, is quickly in faith's account; faith makes future things present. Christ's coming is at hand; the bright morning star begins to appear. As a telescope makes those things which are far away off seem near to the eye, so faith makes Christ, heaven, and the day of recompense seem to be near. It gives a kind of possession of them in this life. Oh, then, Christians, rejoice! Turn your lamentations into "Hallelujahs." It is but a little while--and you shall be made partakers of those blessed things you hope for. Think of the certainty of Christ's appearing, "Behold I come"; and think of the speediness, "I come quickly."

Maintain your hopes against all discouragements either of fear or temptation. Christians, do not let the devil dispute you out of your hopes. A soldier who has the higher ground and has gotten upon a hill, will not let the enemy beat him off his ground--but will keep it to the last breath. Has God set you on the higher ground? Has He raised your hopes as high as heaven? Do not be beaten off your ground; maintain your hopes to the last. Pray to God that He would further clear your title to heaven, that you may be as Mount Zion which cannot be moved.

How this should make us abound in the work of the Lord! He who has a well-grounded hope of heaven, how fervent should he be in duty, how zealous in the cause of God! The hope of glory should give spirit and animation to a Christian. If there could be grief in heaven, surely it would be that we have done God no more service. What an infinite disproportion there is--between our work and reward! Let divine hope be as oil to the lamp, as wind to the sails--to excite and to blow us forward in holy activity for God! We sow in hope. Galatians 6:9, "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

Let us live suitably to our hopes--in a holy, angelic walking. Those who have heaven in their hopes--should have heaven in their lives. Let us walk after that golden pattern which Christ has left us, "the one who says he abides in Him should walk just as He walked." 1 John 2:6. As we hope to have Christ's death for our justification, we must have His life for our imitation. I will conclude with Philippians 1:27, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

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