

The God of Hope

by Tom Macartney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of hope in the Christian life, and how it can be sustained through trust in God, perseverance in faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 119:114, John 17:13, Romans 8:17, Romans 15:4, Romans 15:13, Colossians 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Titus 2:12, Hebrews 6:19, 1 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Christian Hope", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Tom Macartney preaches about the importance of hope in the Christian life, emphasizing that true hope is confidently waiting for something certain in the future. He highlights that hope is essential for survival and recovery from depression, pointing out that Jesus Christ is the only hope for humanity. Macartney discusses the challenges to hope, including the way of the cross that leads to glory, and the need for Christians to have complete assurance in God's control and eternal life through new birth. He concludes by encouraging believers to trust in the God of hope, who fills them with joy, peace, and overflowing hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

What a wonderfully encouraging verse! What an antidote to depression! What a wonderful God we have: In verse 5 of this same chapter, He is called the God of patience and encouragement; in verse 33, He is the God of peace; and here He is, the God of hope, the fountain of hope, able to fill us with joy and peace as we trust Him, so that we overflow with hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for such a life is not the product of a cheery temperament nor positive thinking; it is only possible by His power working in us (Eph. 3: 16, 20). Hope has an important place in the Christian life, yet seems to be the neglected member of the famous trio, Faith, Hope and Love, so often found together in the New Testament. Hence our present meditation on hope. In the Bible, of course, the word hope means something quite different from the way it is generally used in this world, where we say, 'I hope so', meaning that we hope that things will turn out all right but are uncertain whether they will. For the Christian, the word means, confidently waiting for something that is certain but lies in the future. In this fallen world, of course, hope is vital for our survival as human beings - if we give up hope, life is over. The recovery of hope is the answer to the problem of depression, so much on the increase today, but, unfortunately, humanistic psychology generally provides

false grounds for hope, because the root problems of the human heart, which concern our relationship to God, are denied. As Ignorance (in the Pilgrim's Progress) employed Vain-Hope, the ferryman, to help him over the river of death (to his eternal ruin), so this world employs many Vain-Hopes to win through and get by in this life and the next. The fact is that Jesus Christ is the only hope of this fallen race. Apart from Him there is no hope for anyone. But, for Christians, hope is of special importance because of the special trials they endure as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and because God is bringing them up to be like Him, and training them for usefulness in His kingdom. What then are the features of a Christian's hope?

1. He has complete assurance regarding the future. He knows that God is in control of everything and working out His great plan, and that his life is part of it. He knows that he has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, for a purpose, the hope of His calling, and that his Saviour is coming again to reign.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living, undying, hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance beyond the reach of change and decay, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4). "That we who have fled for refuge to seize hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:13-20).

"We should live sober, upright and godly lives in this present world, while we wait expectantly for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12, 13).

2. He knows he has received eternal life through new birth, and that this is a guarantee that all will be well in the end whatever happens on the way.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

And he also has the constant encouragement of the Scriptures to sustain hope.

"That through patience and the encouragement of the Scriptures we may have hope" (Romans 15:4).

"You are my hiding place and my shield: I hope in your word" (Psalm 119:114).

3. He has the whole armour of God, including the helmet, the hope of salvation, in which to face the foe in the battles of life and the spiritual warfare in which the Christian is involved. We shall say more about this later. But we must now consider the challenge to hope, which we shall certainly encounter if our hearts are set on wholeheartedly following the Lord. It is the challenge of the Way of the cross, which alone leads to glory.

"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

"I have been crucified with Christ ... Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

"We continually carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the resurrection life of Jesus may also be revealed in these same bodies" (2 Cor. 4:10, 11).

These verses, and many others, show that His cross has aspects and implications beyond His unique atoning death. Here we consider the way of the cross. The Lord has a plan for our lives, and has planted a sense of purpose and destiny in us His children. This, of course, has nothing to do with our self-centred plans and ambitions, but we are right in thinking our lives are meant to be fruitful and purposeful. And yet

so often we find ourselves hedged in by frustrating circumstances. We shall consider examples of this in the Bible presently. But why does the Lord allow this frustration? It is the law of the cross: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit." Consider how the Lord Jesus Himself came to the throne, His appointed place in the Father's plan. For Him it was the way of humiliation, limitation and frustration, the way of the cross: "I have a baptism to undergo; and how am I hemmed in on every side till it be completed!" How then can it be otherwise for us? Think of a great dam, built to provide light and power for millions. How frustrated the waters behind it must feel, longing to be free. It is the law of fulfilment through frustration. The frustration of the waters is converted into light and power for others.

Now, of course, we may take an easier way, try to have the best of both worlds, give the Lord a place in our lives, but reserve some rights to ourselves, such as taking time off from following Him. Today, 'Fun Christianity', getting as close as possible to the world and its ways (without actually sinning) seems to be the order of the day, in spite of Romans 12:1, 2 and 1 John 2:15-17. But, by trying to show how much we are on this world's wavelength (a common justification), are we not compromising our testimony as citizens of another world (Phil. 3:20)? If we do this, we may be saved through grace, but we shall forfeit our destiny of usefulness to Him.

But let us return to those who, while wholly committed to the Lord, find themselves in the Valley of Frustration. This is a great verse for such Bunyan's Giant Despair can turn up anywhere along the pilgrim way. Those travelling the Way of the Cross know how easy it is to get into Doubting Castle. Why has the Lord allowed this to happen, this baffling problem to persist for so long? Why? Why? Why? So that we may discover and trust in the God of hope, that, "We should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead ... on whom we have set our hope" (2 Cor. 1:9, 10). It is through death, these impossible circumstances, that life, and growth in the knowledge of God, and usefulness to Him, come. But the test is a real one. Three times the psalmist has to challenge his despondency for he really was down, as these psalms show: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you so troubled within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet again praise Him" (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5) Humanly speaking, all hope will be gone, except in the God of hope. We shall be wrecked on God alone. Then, we shall know something of the joy and peace and hope of which our verse speaks. And out of the depths will come the fruitfulness and the fulfilment of our destiny in Christ for which we long. "We rejoice in hope of sharing the glory of God ... we even rejoice in our sufferings, for we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and that produces a tested and approved character, and that produces hope" (Rom. 5:2-4).

There is a widespread tendency today to think we can by-pass the cross and sail through to glory, but the scriptures say: "Joint-heirs with Christ, provided we share His suffering, so that we may also share His glory" (Rom. 8:17). The cross is written large in the lives of His most valuable servants; but we are all called to be His servants, and therefore to take up the cross.

Consider Abraham: "Though things looked hopeless, Abraham, sustained by hope, believed, and so became the father of many nations, as he had been told" (Rom. 4:18). For 25 years Abraham waited for Isaac. Why so long? Because God was working in him for eternity. As Peter puts it: "These (trials) have come so that your faith, more precious than gold that perishes ... may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:7). (And let us learn too from the tragic outcome of Abraham's 'uncrucified' efforts to produce results; they only produced Ishmael.)

Consider Joseph: As a young man of 17, God gave him dreams of destiny, which doubtless he interpreted in a way flattering to his ego. As we know, his dreams were followed by a catalogue of disasters, until he found himself in Pharaoh's prison with all hope gone, except hope in the God of hope, who never left or failed him. Then, at the age of 30, he was exalted to serve a world (including his family) in dire need. Apart from the depths of discipline, lasting 13 years, he would have been incapable of such high service.

Consider David: His anointing as king by Samuel, as a young man, was followed by long years of painful discipline and contradiction, hunted by Saul and fleeing for his life. His story and psalms reveal the depths to which he went before he was raised to the throne to serve as shepherd-king of God's people.

Consider Paul: Captured by the Lord on the Damascus road for special service, it was about 14 years before his life's work opened up at Antioch. Why so long? He was in God's school, learning Christ. And then, when he was about 60, he spent 4 to 5 years in prison (at Caesarea and Rome), locked up in frustration, we would say, and no doubt he often felt. Yet surely eternity will show that these were the most fruitful years of his life, for out of them came some of his most important letters, and, through his close friend and fellow-worker, Luke, his gospel and the Acts, written about the same time.

Of course, we do things differently today, to our great loss. For, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord." Now we might expect these men of the cross to be marked by depression, not rejoicing in hope. But Isaac means laughter. And Joseph named his two sons, Manasseh - God has made me forget - and Ephraim - God has made me fruitful. And David was the sweet psalmist of Israel, who led its praises. And Paul, who knew so much of the fellowship of His sufferings, can write: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." And the Lord Jesus Himself, supreme in this as in everything, can speak of my joy under the shadow of the cross (John 17:13).

And so we conclude with the victory of hope. Of the Lord Jesus it is written: "Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame." He endured the cross in the power of hope in its glorious outcome. And so it must be with us who follow Him. In the battle we must wear, for a helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8). It is significant that here Paul selects two pieces of the armour listed in Ephesians 6, and gives another angle on them. We are to put on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. The breastplate covers the heart and the helmet the head, the two most vital parts of the body. Both heart and mind need special protection (Phil. 4:7). Our heart-life as Christians, our faith and love relationship with the Lord (and fellow Christians) is supremely important. But so also is our thought-life, what goes on in our minds; and also our attitudes. Note the famous trio, Faith, Hope and Love, linked again. We shall certainly need all three as the coming of the Lord draws nearer, the breastplate of faith and love to protect our living, up-to-date, relationship with the Lord, and the helmet of hope to counter all the swirling mists of doubt and depression seeking to enter our minds in the thick of the battle.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Bible references: Luke 12:50; John 12:24-26; 15:16; Rom. 8:18-25; 12:12; 1 Cor. 13:13; 2 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 1:7, 18; Phil. 3:10; 1 Thess. 1:3; 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:1; Heb. 2:10; 11:1, 13-16; 12:2; Isaiah 55:8; Lam. 3:19-27; Hos. 2:15

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