
Hope — The Expectation of Something Good

By David Wilkerson

July 27, 2009 We hear a lot about hope — from politicians, from numerous books, from tapes and other media. But what is offered in each of these messages doesn't seem to last.

We may get fired up and encouraged by what we hear in such messages. Indeed, we may find ourselves refreshed and hopeful for a season. But what is offered isn't a fixed, experienced hope, and soon it fades away.

The whole world yearns for a steadfast hope. The inner cry of multitudes around the globe right now is, "Somebody, somewhere, please, give me some hope, something that will last."

We long to hear someone preach an all-powerful, life-changing message of hope. We want a message that will lift us above all our fears and trials, something that will set our feet firmly on steadfast hope.

Many wonderful books have been written by people who maintained hope through their awful tragedies and hardships. Their testimonies encourage us, giving our faith a great lift. But, again, our hope fades whenever a severe trial arises in our own lives. The sufferings we endure dash whatever steadfast hope we thought we had. Why?

Hope is not a feeling. Tell me, how many times has your expectation for something good failed you? How many times has your human hope been crushed? How often have you felt like the apostle Paul, who said when he endured a hurricane at sea, "All hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Acts 27:20)?

Paul tells us that the world has no hope. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, "Sorrow not, even as others [the world] which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

By contrast, we as God's people have "hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:18–19). Thus we are exhorted, "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (6:11).

Likewise, Paul prays, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may *abound in hope*, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:13, my italics).

According to Paul, when it comes to the subject of hope, the work of the Holy Spirit must be involved. So, how do we abound in hope, as Paul prays for us to do? How do we rejoice in hope? And how do we obtain the full assurance of it?

A seed of hope is planted at salvation, of course. But there must be a maturing of hope in our walk with Jesus.

Paul outlines for us the path to genuine hope. The book of Hebrews tells us we have a hope that serves as "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Hebrews 6:19).

In short, the path to hope begins with being fully assured we are right with God. We're talking about the assurance that we have peace with God. And Paul supplies that assurance, declaring, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

In a famous old hymn of the church, the writer states, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

Indeed, this is peace: to believe God's promise that by faith in Christ's shed blood, he considers (reckons) me righteous. He does so even though I am not perfect. And his righteousness is conferred on me not by any good I have done. It is all by faith.

The fact is, you can have no settled peace, no true hope, until you no longer waver about your acceptance in Christ. This acceptance is based on not what your flesh accuses you of being, or what the devil accuses you of being. It is based solely on what God sees you to be in Christ.

Paul confirms our right standing with God through Christ:

"If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Romans 5:10).

Nevertheless, our hearts condemn us when we fail. Though our hearts condemn us, we are told by John, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ" (1 John 2:1). Let me give an example of this from Jesus' own life.

The day before Christ was crucified, he washed his disciples' feet. He told these very imperfect men, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all" (John 13:10).

You may wonder: "How could Jesus say these disciples were 'clean'?" Any casual onlooker at the scene would have been astonished by Jesus' statement. The eleven men he spoke to had already displayed pride, unbelief, selfishness, ambition, covetousness, inconsistency, vindictiveness.

The fact is, Christ made this statement about them because he had chosen them. *He* had put them on the path to holiness. It was all by grace!

Jesus also knew what was in the disciples' hearts despite their utter imperfection. Moreover, he saw ahead to the time of brokenness and contriteness they were about to enter. The Lord's own testimony is this: "To this man will I look, even him that is poor and of a contrite spirit" (Isaiah 66:2).

Let's say I ask you to list all of the sins that these disciples had committed. I believe I could confidently say that you and I have been guilty of all the same sins during certain seasons in our lifetime. Yet Jesus has the answer for us all: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

The path to hope leads to "tribulation and many afflictions." The path toward hope is one of suffering, sorrows and pain. It doesn't matter how pious, loving or good you are. If Christ is in you, you will become a partaker in his sufferings.

"But *rejoice*, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13, my italics). Peter tells us plainly, "Rejoice in your suffering." And Paul says something similar: "Rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Rejoice in suffering? This is one of those hard sayings of the Scriptures, indeed, one of the very hardest. Yet Paul goes even further:

“And not only so, but we *glory* in tribulations also” (Romans 5:3, my italics). Paul isn’t talking here about a shout or exclamation we are to make despite our trial. Rather, what he’s describing is simply being able to see Jesus in our trial. In spite of our very real human fears, in spite of a situation that appears to be utterly hopeless, we can still say, “God will provide a way.”

Of course it can be said, “There is no such path toward ‘mature’ hope.” Some Christians may claim, “The path of hope is simply this: My hope rests in ‘Christ in me, the hope of glory’” (see Colossians 1:27).

Very true. But if Christ is in us, he is going to lead us into the path that Paul describes. You see, the Holy Spirit wants our hope to be more than a theological phrase. It has to be a hope that is steadfast, with a sure foundation underneath it. In short, our hope is to be “Christ in us, *working* in us.”

Here is the path that Paul gives us:

First, there is *complete trust* in being justified by Christ’s blood (Romans 5:1).

Second, this very confidence *sets our souls at peace* (5:1).

Third, we have confidence that *we have access to God’s throne* at any time (5:2). This means increasingly calling on the Lord, with prayers “whereby we stand” (5:2).

Fourth, we begin to *rejoice in the glory of a paradise* that is ours to come. “Rejoicing in the hope of glory.”

Fifth, we *glory in tribulations*. It is one thing to rejoice in the hope of heaven. It is something else entirely to rejoice in tribulations. And this notion of glorying in tribulations is impossible to the human mind. It becomes possible only to those who believe what God’s Word says about suffering: that *Christ is at work in us* in the midst of every trial.

Paul explains the path this way: “Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Romans 5:3–4). Do you see? Tribulation accomplishes patience. Patience furnishes experience. And experience accomplishes hope.

Let me talk now about how experience accomplishes hope. God uses his people to dispense hope.

When I personally need some measure of hope, I want to speak to someone I know, someone who has experience with enduring tribulation and pain. I don’t want someone who’ll offer me hollow platitudes, such as, “Just hang in there,” “Just trust God.” My suffering soul cannot be moved or touched by unfounded words of human sympathy.

Rather, I would love to talk for half an hour with the believer who e-mailed me recently about having to watch his wife slowly die of Lou Gehrig’s disease. As this man described to me the depth of his pain, he said, “God is good. He is seeing me through.”

I would also love to talk with the Christian woman in Indonesia who has suffered physical pain for

years, enduring one operation after another in vain. Despite her ongoing trial, she praises God and gives him glory in all things. Here is someone who has both patience and experience in the suffering that works hope.

My faith and hope are greatly encouraged by friends I know who are veterans of spiritual warfare. I have witnessed the many tribulations of such faithful friends. And I know of their present suffering, sorrow and pain. When I call them I ask, "How are you doing?" I know the answer ahead of time, and it brings great hope to me.

They do not fake their responses. They are totally honest when they say, "David, I'm really hurting. Sometimes the pain overwhelms me. At times I hurt so badly it brings me to tears."

These saints are enduring the fires of affliction. Yet there always comes from them a reassuring word: "God is bringing me through. I know he is faithful. And I trust him. I know he is with me."

Almost every time I talk with them, these overcomers have a word for me. It's a word that is very real and lasting, something that God has shown them in the depth of their trial. Their steadfast faith in the midst of their suffering builds up my own faith amid my trial.

As I encounter the steadfast faith of these saints, the Holy Spirit keeps reminding me of Deuteronomy 8:2-3:

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness...

"He humbled thee, and suffered [allowed] thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

I repeat these words throughout my days: "I live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." If God's word cannot be trusted — if the Bible is not the very inspired Word of God — then life is in vain. There could be no hope on the face of this earth.

When this word in Deuteronomy came to Israel, conditions in the wilderness had become very scary for them. God had allowed them to experience pangs of hunger and thirst. And now from the very mouth of the Lord we hear these words: "I humbled you. I allowed you to suffer hunger and thirst. It's all because I sought to make you know you can trust me. *You can live on my promises.*"

God was not going to let his people starve or die of thirst. He knew exactly what he would do to deliver them. Thus, it is all the more tragic that no one except Joshua and Caleb would take a stand and state in faith, "Even if I die in the process, I will go on trusting." "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him" (Job 13:15). "To whom shall we turn? You alone, Lord, have the words of eternal life" (see John 6:68).

Beloved, God has a plan for your deliverance. Our Lord knows how to deliver the afflicted.

Oh, how we need the Holy Spirit to lead and comfort us in our trying times. Without his presence, his guidance, his outpouring of strength to us daily, none of us could make it. No human determination, no setting of our mind to the task, can survive the daily testings we endure on the path.

Daily, we must cast ourselves upon God's revealed Word and trust the Holy Spirit to make it become life to us. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.... He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6, 9).

If God created all things with his word and his breath, will he not, in his time, speak hope to you in your trial? He knows just how to bring such hope, real and lasting, sure and steadfast.

I close with this word: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:7). May God make your experience become hope and life to you. Amen!

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