

A Christian's Hope

Introduction. I have met quite a few optimists in my time but far more pessimists and cynics. Optimists lift me up while pessimists drag me down with them. For example, Ted Turner, in 2003, said, "If I had to predict, the way things are going, I'd say the chances are about 50-50 that humanity will be extinct or nearly extinct within 50 years."

Like anywhere else, there are optimists and pessimists in the church. Often a pessimist will hold a church back with gloom and doom while an optimist will get the church to think and act in positive directions. Optimism is simply a tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the best aspects of a situation.

Why should we be optimistic? Because we have hope (Romans 5:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13)! A lot of people equate hope with wishful thinking, like "I hope I get a raise," or "I hope I pass the test," or "I hope Mom serves apple pie for dessert." I will have to admit that I have used the phrase, "I hope this economy gets better" a lot these days. But in the Bible, hope means certainty. James Montgomery Boice writes, "The only reason it is called hope rather than certainty is that we do not possess what is hoped for yet, although we will" (cf. Romans 8:24-25). If we want to be full of optimism, we need to know about hope.

I. ***We Need To Ask In Hope***

- A. You probably already know that faith is a requirement for our prayers to be answered (Mark 11:24; James 1:5-8). Hope is the parent of faith. First we believe that God is going to answer our prayers, and then we look forward to the answer.
- B. During his days as President, Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river which had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, a stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The president agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, "Tell me, why did you ask the President to take you across the river?" The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the President who had helped him. "All I know," he said, "Is that on some of your faces was written the answer 'No,' and on some of them was the answer 'Yes.' His was a 'Yes' face."

- C. When we ask within God's will, we can have confidence (Matthew 7:7-11; James 4:1-3; 1 John 5:14-15). If I am not confident I do not have hope. If I am confident, I have hope.

II. **We Need To Abide In Hope**

- A. The Christian has a very special hope and that hope is the coming of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Titus 1:2; cf. Luke 12:40).
- B. Looking forward to the Lord's glorious appearing ought to affect our behavior and attitude (Titus 2:11-13).
1. If you are looking forward to His coming, you need to deny ungodliness. Ungodliness is simply anything God does not approve. How would you feel if Jesus returned and He caught you doing something that did not please Him?
 2. If you are looking forward to His coming, you should also deny worldly lusts. Worldly lusts cause us to sin (Romans 6:12; 13:14; cf. Galatians 5:24).
 3. On the other hand, you must be sober or serious about your behavior, living righteously, and do what pleases God. Our actions should be a reflection of our hope.
 - a) The way to convert others for Christ is to preach a sermon to them; a sermon of actions, not of words. Let them see your good works of acting the way a Christian should and they will glorify God because of you (Matthew 5:14-16).
 - b) People will not listen to you unless your words are backed up by the way you live. As people see in your actions the hope that Jesus gives, they will want to hear your words (1 Peter 3:15).
- C. The coming of Jesus should be such a blessed hope that you look forward to His coming and want your life to be in order when He arrives (cf. Matthew 25:1-13).
- D. Halford Luccock, in his book, *Unfinished Business*, relates the story of a man who had spent many summers in Flagstaff, Maine. The town was to be flooded for a hydroelectric project. In the months before it was flooded, improvements and repairs in the town ceased. What was the use of painting a house if it was going to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So week by week, the town became more and more run down. Then he added by way of explanation: "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."

III. **We Need To Abound In Hope**

- A. As Paul concludes the book of Romans, he says some worthy words about hope (Romans 15:13).

1. Concerning the Messiah, Isaiah said, "In him shall the Gentiles trust" (11:10). God made hope possible to those who were without hope (Ephesians 2:1-2). Hope is no longer a passion for the possible; it is a passion for the promise (Proverbs 14:32).
 2. The reason you have hope is because of what Jesus did for you on the cross (Hebrews 2:17-18; 6:11; 1 Peter 1:18-21).
- B. Two essentials that God wants you to have are peace and joy (John 14:27; 15:11).
1. If you trust Jesus enough to pray and cast all your care upon Him, you will be filled with peace (Philippians 4:6-7).
 2. If you trust Jesus enough to obey Him, you will be filled with joy (Romans 5:11). If you are filled with peace and joy, you will abound with hope.

Conclusion. The power of the Holy Spirit made hope and peace possible, for the teaching of the Holy Spirit is the source of all our knowledge, joy, peace, and hope (Romans 12:12; Hebrews 3:6). Clare Boothe Luce said, "There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them."

As Vice President, George H. W. Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1982. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: she reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.

Samson, David, and many other celebrated men full of the Holy Spirit fell into grievous sins. Job and Jeremiah cursed the day of their birth; Elijah and Jonah were weary of life and desired death. No one has ever fallen so grievously that they may not rise again, and no one stands so firmly that they may not fall. If all these men fell, I may too. If they rose again, I may too. Psalm 130:7 says, "Let Israel hope in the Lord." We are the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), and if you are ready to trust and obey, do it while we stand and sing.