

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 23 April 2006

No. T0415

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

The Believer's Hope - He brings assurance

Is it just my perception or have you noticed the way in which the media comments on people whose deaths make news? Increasingly there seems to be a sense of hopelessness in such announcements, as though death were the end of an individual's existence - that there's nothing after it! Sometimes this view manifests itself in the courts. Recently a judge, in passing sentence on a murderer, said he had recompensed for the life the young victim would have enjoyed. But is this possible? And is death as hopeless and senseless for the Christian believer? In some parts of the world, believers are killed for because they are Christians. Others experience tragic, or what we would call untimely, deaths due to accidents, murder, disasters and terminal illnesses. All of these are but part of what happens to fallen man for "*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*", Hebrews 9:27. By contrast, the Christian believer has real **hope** in the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings him **assurance** whatever may personally happen to him. As the apostle Paul wrote: "*If in this life only we have **hope** in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable*", 1 Corinthians 15:19. Yes, there **is** life after death for Christians. When believers die there's gain, the gain of the glory of eternity! And it's to be with Christ, which is far, far better than anything that life on earth can offer!

In speaking about hope, I'm not using the word as we would generally use it in English, meaning that it's something that we would like to happen. For example, I hope that our September family holiday in Scotland will be accompanied by good weather. But there's no guarantee of that! However, the believer's **hope** is absolutely sure, because it's founded in Christ. Romans 8:17 states that it's to be joint-heirs with Christ in His future glory in heaven. Verses 23-25 go on to explain exactly what **hope** is: "*we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we...groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this **hope**, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we **hope** for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*". Then verses 28-30 describe both the certainty and blessedness of it: "*all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified*".

This **hope** was first promised to the eleven apostles in the Upper Room on the night that Jesus Himself was taken away to be crucified. As they sensed their impending loss, He announced: "*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*", John 14:1-3. When Christ ascended to heaven, two angels informed the disciples: "*This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*", Acts 1:11. Ever since then, that Coming of the Lord has been the **hope** of Christian believers.

You may question the lengthy time lapse between the Ascension and the Second Coming, but according to the apostle Peter that hope is firmly established in the resurrection of Christ Himself, as an enduring, and an abiding fact: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you*", 1 Peter 1:3-4. Such was its reality to those first century Christians that the apostle Paul didn't expect to die and it was even rumoured amongst them that the apostle John would still be alive on earth when Christ returned!

The **assurance** of this **hope** was provided very early in Christian history in the first letter ever written to a church. The apostle Paul hadn't been able to spend much time with his Thessalonian converts, so he wrote to establish them in the Christian faith. They incorrectly thought that any believer who died before the Second Coming occurred would miss out on Christ's kingdom and glory. Although the Lord's Coming is mentioned in each chapter of 1 Thessalonians, it's 4:13-5:11 which specifically corrects this misconception and provides much valuable teaching on the believer's **hope**.

First of all, Paul states that the believer's **hope** is part of the Christian Gospel: "*we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*", 4:14. Jesus rose again from among the dead and so we can be confident that the body of any believer who dies before Christ returns will be resurrected when He

comes. In fact, dead believers are said just to be asleep through Jesus. Jesus has allowed them to die and so He'll wake them up again, just like parents put children to bed at night knowing that they'll wake up in the morning! Meanwhile dead believers continue to be, as to their souls and spirits, very much alive, "*absent from the body [but] present with the Lord*", 2 Corinthians 5:8.

In verses 15-18 of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says that He received a special revelation from the Lord about His Second Coming. Here is an outline of this event:

- The Lord will descend from heaven to claim His own people for Himself
- He'll give an assembling shout and, just like a military commander, He'll be obeyed! All believers, both dead and alive, will hear His voice and respond to it.
- The archangel's voice will be heard. (The archangel guards the bodies of dead saints)
- The trumpet of God will sound. (A further military idea is employed, that of a Roman army breaking camp, getting ready, and then marching, all in response to trumpet calls.)
- Living believers don't have the advantage, for, first of all, the "dead in Christ" will be resurrected. That is, their bodies will be raised from the graves and reunited with their spirits and souls.
- Believers who are living on earth at the time of this resurrection will then be gathered together with these resurrected saints.
- Then together they're 'snatched' from the earth and taken up to heaven. (This catching away is known as 'The Rapture', a name derived from a Latin word meaning 'to snatch'.)
- United, all believers advance heavenward to meet the Lord in the air, in the clouds - just as was promised in Acts 1:11. (The word 'meet' conveys the idea of meeting an important dignitary.)
- We'll then be "with Him" forever! It's then that the **believer's hope** is fully, and completely, realised.

1 Corinthians 15 teaches that there'll be a resurrection to life of all believers. Verses 36-50 give answers to the questions of verse 35: "*How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?*" Verses 51-54 provide further teaching about the Rapture:

- It's a special secret for Christian believers to learn, understand and enjoy.
- It tells us that not all believers will die. Those who are alive on earth at the time of the Rapture will be translated, just like Enoch of old who did **not** see death.
- But all believers will experience resurrection. That is, their bodies will be changed to make them suitable for the eternal environment of heaven. Verse 44 describes their new bodies as being 'spiritual', which means that they'll be both immortal and incorruptible! Never again can they be subject to death and decay. They'll be just like Jesus is now!
- The whole event will take place extremely quickly, and it will be all over in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Therefore, it will not, and cannot, be witnessed by any unbelievers living on earth at that time.
- The Rapture is part of the First Resurrection, when death is being swallowed up in victory. (The rampant progress of the First Resurrection, marching like an unstoppable victorious army, is described in detail in earlier verses of 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20-28. Verse 26 points out the final enemy to be destroyed will be death itself!) That's why Paul exclaims: "*then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*", verses 54-57.

As we begin to appreciate this **hope**, we realise that it is not only that it brings us assurance of future security, but that it also has many practical present-day benefits. Let's consider some of these.

First, and foremost, we have Jesus already living for us in heaven. To paraphrase Hebrews 6:18-20, He's the Forerunner who has entered God's presence behind the veil for us that we might have strong consolation. This **hope**,

of being there also, is set before us as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. That's because Jesus has become, in His resurrection and ascension, a High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Jesus is the first Man to enter heaven. Therefore we know that, even if 'the billows roll', we're secure because we're 'fastened to the rock that cannot fail!' Life throws many things at us, but we have the assurance that, come what may, we'll get safely home! Strong encouragement indeed!

Knowing Jesus as our Forerunner assures us of our place in heaven. It also causes us to "*boast in hope of the glory of God*". That is, we rejoice that our destiny's in glory above with Christ. When we reach it, the "*hope of eternal life*" will be realised. At the present time, we boast when we worship God, to whom we have been reconciled through our Lord Jesus Christ, and so we experience eternal life now. But eternal life in its fullness can only be lived in its proper environment, heaven.

But Romans 5 states that we also boast in adversities, that is, in tribulations, which produce perseverance. Perseverance is character-building for it's in the difficulties of life that our **hope** becomes a real encouragement to us. But it's especially when we lose loved ones that this **hope** takes on a special meaning. None of us escapes those deep and painful experiences that death brings. (Death is man's greatest enemy. It robs us of the best that we have in this life.) I vividly remember the sorrows my family felt when my father-in-law died suddenly in his mid-fifties; and again a couple of years later when my brother died of cancer, he being only twenty-eight years old. More recently my frail old mother expectedly passed away, but the sorrow was no less intense for us! In such circumstances, believers experience the reality of Paul's statement: "*concerning those who have fallen asleep ... you sorrow [not] as others who have no hope*", 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Notice this contrast: believers do grieve, but in a different way to unbelievers. Because unbelievers have no hope, they have nothing to look forward to after death. But believers know for certain that they'll be "*with the Lord*." (If any listener is currently experiencing the sorrows of bereavement, there's a particular poignancy about today's talk for the exhortation is in verse 18: "*comfort one another with these words*")!

However, believers must always keep in mind that the Lord Jesus Christ could return at any time. He says: "*Surely I am coming quickly*". Our response should be: "*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*" Revelation 22:20-21. It's true that the unbelieving world neither wants Christ to return, nor thinks that He ever will. This is emphasised in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4: "*you yourselves know perfectly that the ... Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape*". The present era is night-time for believers, but they themselves "*are not in darkness*". That is, they're morally different from the world. They're "*all sons of light and sons of the day*". Therefore it's necessary for us to "*watch*", that is, "*keep awake*". We must live as those who are waiting for their Lord to return. We must also "*be sober, put on the breastplate of faith and love, and have as a helmet the hope of salvation*". To wear the breastplate of faith and love is to practise personal godliness. To wear the **hope**-of-salvation helmet is to have our thinking guarded and protected from any doubts that may come into our minds about the certainty of our future for: "*God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him*", verses 9-10. With this certainty, we comfort and edify one another, when we remind each other of our **hope** in Christ's return.

Another practical aspect about the believer's **hope** is presented in 1 John 3:2-3: "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*". This is also emphasised in 1 Corinthians 15:47-49: "*The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*" 1 John 3:3 is tremendous - we're going to see Jesus in heaven! The practical implications of such teaching are very challenging! I'm required to be like Him now. I must live in a clean way in a defiling environment, which is dominated by sin and a worldly way of living summed up as: "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*", 1 John 2:16.

The final point that I want to make about the believer's **hope** is that it encompasses the glory of Christ's future kingdom on earth, as well as the eternal glory of heaven. Believers will enjoy both of these with Him. The Second Coming of the Lord embraces both His coming for His own at the Rapture, and His manifestation to this world, when he'll set up His everlasting kingdom and reign over all of the world. Titus 2:12-13 relates the past, present and future realities of the Gospel. It states that believers are taught by the grace of God to be "*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ*". Man's enemies - disease, disasters, death and demons, continue to be ever-present, daily experiences. Even with the tremendous humanitarian efforts of the twenty-first century, mankind is no nearer solving the world's basic problems of injustice, hunger and war. We also have new dangers to face, such as terrorism, pollution and climate change. Despite what the advert says, the future is bleak not bright. But the believer's **hope** for this world is in Christ's kingdom. When He returns and establishes His rule over all the world, every injustice will be put right, righteousness will reign, and there'll be universal peace ('nations...shall learn war [no] more'). Then, and only then, will men dwell in safety and will be satisfied with the

plentiful supplies from a cleansed and replenished earth. All peoples will be blessed through Him, the King of kings and the Lord of lords! And Christ's kingdom will not be superseded. 1 Corinthians 15:28 states that it will be handed over to God at the start of the eternal day so that "God may be all and in all".

A Gospel preacher I knew often used a thought-provoking saying: "Believers have an endless **hope**, but unbelievers have a hopeless end!" I suppose he meant that life in heaven is never-ending for the saved; and that there's no reversal of eternal punishment for the lost. Which of the two will it be for you? If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in His death and His resurrection, you'll be saved. If you do **not** believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the preacher said, you don't have any hope at all and you'll be lost. The only future for you is one of coming judgement from God, with all its eternal consequences.

Let's pray.

God and Father, may everyone of us be able to bless You for begetting us anew and for giving us the living **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. Give us to rest our **hope** fully upon the grace that is to be brought to us at His revelation. For His Name's sake. Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.