

“Hope”
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(faith; hope)

(For a fuller treatment of Psalms 42 and 43 please see “sermons” at www.soundliving.org)

Before thinking about the source and means of hope, let’s think about what Christian hope is and is not.

First of all what it is not:

It is not the hope of “I hope so.”

Hope is always for something we desire.

We never say we hope we get in an accident.

So, “I hope so” is desire but it is hope without confidence and in fact with a fair amount of doubt that what is desired will ever happen.

That kind of hope is simply wishful thinking.

Neither is it the hope of “There is hope now that he’s in college.”

This too is desire and now with more confidence yet still uncertain.

This is waiting with fingers crossed.

Nor is Christian hope the hope of a hiker saying, “I believe we going to reach the top of the mountain.”

This is optimism, something desired and expected with confidence.

But even this hope, this “confident expectation,” is not sufficient to explain Christian hope.

Such confidence may be misplaced.

My son may hope with confident expectation that he is going to be an NBA star but he may be wrong.

Such confidence may be nothing more than optimism.

We all love optimistic people but optimism is not the same as Christian hope.

Worldly optimism is simply a hope in hope.

It is the person who says, “At least we have hope.”

That's just silly! That's Little Orphan Annie, singing "Tomorrow."

At best, worldly optimism is based on a belief in human progress.

Human progress believes that "Because man's knowledge grows and his capacity for applying knowledge increases, life must become better and better." Emil Brunner describing the origins of modern optimism in *Faith, Hope and Love*, 38

The temptation then is to base our hope in material prosperity or physical health or the feeling of happiness.

If I'm prosperous, healthy and happy, then hope has been realized. And then we set out to turn those hopes into reality by our own means.

Emil Bruner wrote, "If man...thinks paradise must come within this earthly life, he is bound to take recourse to coercion and violence to produce it." Emil Bruner, *Faith, Hope and Love*, 54

And the **Christian** who bases his hope in those things becomes very critical of God.

Because our objectives are different than God's, we charge God with unfairness and we despise his means of accomplishing his objectives in our lives.

So when the Psalmist says, "Put your hope in God," what does he mean?

The **source** of Christian hope is God.

Romans 15:13 "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.

"For the Christian, hope never resorts to 'Keep hoping, things may get better.' Christian hope says, rather, 'Things may get worse: anything may happen; **but God...**' Such hope is essentially a stable one, because it is grounded in nothing so fluctuating and uncertain as circumstances, still less in moods, which change, but (it is grounded) in the undeviating reliability of God's character." (Moule, *The Meaning of Hope*, 18)

The mistake we make is to look for a source of comfort in ourselves. But "When we gaze upon God, then first the chance of (comfort) dawns. He is not affected by our mutability: our changes do not alter him. When we are restless, he remains serene and calm; when we are low, selfish, or

dispirited, he is still the unalterable “I AM., the same yesterday, today and forever, in whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning. What God is in himself, not what we may chance to feel him in this way or that moment to be, that is our hope. My soul, hope in God.” (Perowne, *Psalms*, 352)

“Hope is a gift of God through Christ that produces a confident, unshakable trust in his faithfulness, and a vibrant expectation of his timely interventions in keeping with his gracious promises to us.” (Lloyd John Ogilvie, *A Future and a Hope*, 50)

We can have such confidence in our God that we are able to live, day by day, with the continuing expectation that it is nothing but good he has in mind for us.

The great temptation is to simply endure our present circumstances and “hope” they will pass instead of seeing in them the beginning of what God is doing.

God is a God of hope, who is out in front of us in life, who goes before us.

God comes from the future and, from his perspective, reaches back into our lives to open new possibilities for us, to call us forward to his future.

Jesus said the Kingdom of God had come - the Kingdom of God has reached back, to us today.

We live in the presence of the risen Christ who is making all things new.

Birth may be traumatic, but it is good.

It is tempting for us, as Christians, to think only of past and future and forget the present.

We say Christ died for our sins in the past and is coming again in the future but what is Christ doing now?

Jesus is even now bringing his Kingdom to pass.

What is your future?

We all live anticipating something better in the future.

When we stop hoping, we stop living.

Our present actions find their energy in our anticipation of the future.

And the future is not only about aging and death but about learning and growing in relationship with Jesus.

The future is about what God will do today, what new beginning starts today.

And we can live with that hope because we know God – our hope is in him and his work.

But what is our temptation?

Jurgan Multmann wrote, that Christians, “no longer have confidence in the humanity which God (is recreating). It is a fearfulness fed by lack of faith which leads to capitulation before the power of evil. God exalted human beings and opened to them a vista into what is wide and free, but human beings hang back and say no. God promises the new creation of all things but human beings behave as if everything remains as it was.” (Jurgan Multmann, *In the End, the Beginning*, 93)

Hopelessness leads to resignation, boredom with life, emptiness, amusing ourselves to death (Neil Postman), and waiting to die.

We say we believe in God and heaven but we live as if “there is no tomorrow that shines with God’s promises.” (Ben Patterson, *Waiting*, 13)

Hope is not seen only when the end comes but also in the beginning of things in every minute.

Fundamentalist Christianity “calls the world evil and leaves it. Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it.” Walter Rauschenbusch in Jurgan Multmann, *In the End, the Beginning*, 91

We don’t just look forward to the Second Coming; we look forward to the future made possible today by the grace of God.

Today is the first day of the rest of eternity!

Hope is found not only in birth (God’s creation of us) but in rebirth (God’s recreation of us) and in sanctification (God’s shaping us) and in resurrection (God’s remaking even of our bodies).

God is doing a work in us, creating, at every age.

The future doesn’t just belong to the young – but to all.

In fact if age is defined in relationship to time, we are all young – because eternity is yet ahead.

So what is hope?

Hope is a vibrant expectation that God will do his gracious work in our lives by whatever means he chooses.

And so how does that hope become ours?

As the Psalmist demonstrates, it is not something we conjure up by talking ourselves into an optimistic frame of mind.

The source of that hope is obviously God himself.

Christian hope is a gift from God.

And it becomes ours as we ask him and believe him.

Isn't that what the Psalmist experienced?

He finally realized that his discouragement, his despair, would not go away by simply talking to himself, by rehearsing the facts of the good and evil in his life.

He desperately needed for God to intervene and he asked God to do so and he waited with his hope in God.

And he used the means of grace that God has provided – namely God's word.

Psalm 43:3 "Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me."

Many times in the Bible, God and his Word are thought of as synonymous.

Psalm 119:14 "I have put my hope in your word."

It is the sure promise of our faithful God that is our hope.

Do we meditate on his word so that we are more and more certain of his promises to us and his sovereign love to make it happen?

How can we know he is great and good unless we learn of him in his word?

Harry Fosdick said, "In the crises of life...our words show where our souls have been feeding." Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Beam*, December 1965, 16

Will we feed our souls on his word so that we may know him in all his grace and power?

Will we stop just talking to ourselves rehearsing the difficulties of life and instead turn to God in prayer – asking and trusting him to be about his good work in our lives?

Romans 15:13 “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.

Psalm 43:5 “Why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.