

Hope for the World?

By

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There's a question mark after the above title because that's just the way most people look at it. IS there hope for this world? Modern man has sought from every conceivable source to find a solution to his problems, and so far every one has failed. Recently into the lime-light of public events has appeared the so-called prophetess, Jeane Dixon. It is significant that in our advanced age of space-craft, miracle- electronics and other great feats of man, he still reverts to the heathen practice of the crystal ball to find out what to do next.

HOPE DISTORTED

For many years I have heard preachers talk about "Christ, the Hope of the World." Generally the speaker lumps the whole world into one pot, and then talks as if Christ will save the whole works, if only more Christians would get on the ball and be a bit more zealous, generous and evangelistic.

Whether intended or not, the impression is that we Christians are hoping for some kind of great change in the human race so that the whole world will become a Garden of Eden, and we can live at peace and in perfect plenty and happiness. I put in that "plenty" because most people equate happiness with things, all kinds of things; plenty of things. So men talk about hope for the world, and the listener thinks about peace and prosperity. Of course peace and prosperity depend on world economy, foreign exchange of goods, and in general the whole complex system of world trade, which means that it must include the great majority of people who are anti-Christian! Therefore "hope" for this world must embrace the Hindu, Buddhist, Mohammedan, Communists and any other atheists.

From this viewpoint any one can see that hope is getting farther and farther away. To say that Christ is the Hope of the World, meaning that He is going to bring about peace and happiness for all, is to speak in terms so unreal as to be almost unintelligible in our day.

Of course, this is not what the Bible means by hope, but it is the meaning man has placed upon it because of his wishful thinking. Following the materialistic philosophy where one's success is measured by the "abundance of things he possesses," a philosophy rejected by Jesus (Luke 12:15), men reason that the only kind of hope for them is the kind described above, where they may have prosperity and thus the opportunity of satisfying their fleshly desires. If Christ can bring about such an environment then they are all for Him, He becomes their hope just as He was Judas' hope. Judas expected to satisfy his covetousness by a position in the kingdom he expected Jesus to form. When it became obvious that such a kingdom was not forthcoming, he betrayed Christ and took what he could, 30 pieces of silver, to compensate for his time and effort.

Now the problem in churches today is that a great many members have this kind of present worldly hope in mind when we talk about Christ, the hope of the world. They wish it were true, but it is getting more and more difficult to actually put any confidence in it. While hoping that things will get better, they keep watching things get worse. The result is that they kind of despair and give up any kind of hope whatever.

HOPE IS PERSONAL

The Bible does not say that there is any hope for the world! True, “God so loved the world . . .,” but loving His creation does not change it. Peter writes that “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” but in the same chapter he tells us three times that the world will be destroyed by God’s power (2 Peter 3).

But this is not to say that there isn’t hope. There is plenty of hope — for you, the next fellow, and for anyone else in the world that will respond to that love of God and repent. Christ, therefore, is the hope of all people in the world who repent and are saved by Him.

It is hard for some folk to realize that God is not going to save the world en masse. In our organized society it is hard to realize that God does not deal with organizations nor save men because they “belong,” but treats them on an individual basis. This has always been His way.

From the flood God saved eight people because of their faith, that is; their personal response to Him. The rest of the world was unsaved and perished. From the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah God saved only three people. Not even Lot’s wife was spared. These two great examples, which are stated by Christ and the apostles as; examples of the final judgment and destruction of the world, should show conclusively that a man’s hope depends on his own personal response to God.

Even in the “Chosen” nation of Israel, it was only those who remained faithful to God that entered the Promised Land. Only those who “looked” upon the brass serpent were cured of snake-bite. Only the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua, of all the adults who left Egypt, were allowed to enter Canaan. Finally, the 12 tribes were overrun and taken captive, and only a relatively few who were faithful to God were spared. “Hope” for the chosen people was limited to individuals with true faith”

HOPE DEFINED

Christ is our hope only in the sense of saving us FROM the world, not saving us with it. The Bible says that we Christians are, to be “delivered out of this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). The clear teaching of Scripture is that Christ will someday return and make all HIS people immortal, taking us from this world. The world and the people left, including all the resurrected dead who had rejected God, will then be destroyed by fire. The world will become the “lake of fire,” the horrible “Gehenna” of which Jesus talked, where there will be a final punishment by a fiery death. Such punishment will be the “second death,” for even those who died before judgment will be raised up to face their judgment and will

then die the second time in the lake of fire. It will be the final and eternal punishment, for once punished by death, this punishment shall stand as the finished product of judgment forever (1 Thess. 4:16-17, 2 Peter 3:7-12, Rev.20:14).

So the Scriptures speak of man perishing, having both body and soul destroyed in Gehenna (usually translated “hell”) and being destroyed from the face of the Lord (Matt. 10:28, 2 Thess. 1:9). And this is why we say Christ is the HOPE, because He is the one who can rescue us from that final judgment and death. By His own willful submission to judgment, as our substitute, He has undergone the punishment in our place when He “died for the ungodly.” He died the death, paid the penalty, and “there is therefore now no condemnation” to everyone that is in Christ (Romans 5:6, 8:1).

What does this have to do with the hope of the world? Nothing, if we mean by “the world” the whole mass of humanity. The Bible teaches that the world will continue in a down-hill rush of violence, corruption and war until the whole works is united under a God-hating world power where all truth about God is outlawed. Then, Christ will appear and remove all Christians, so that judgment and destruction of the Christ-rejecters may be executed.

THE DILEMMA

This poses a problem for the church member who would like to be included in the saved, but who also likes to be included in the world’s enterprises. He simply doesn’t want to admit that the world is really headed for this kind of unhappy ending. Or, if it is, it’s got to be a long ways off! He rejects any meditation and contemplation on the possibility of personally facing this catastrophic situation, when he must be either a part of the redeemed cut loose completely from this world, or a part of the world that is to be destroyed. He wants a part on both sides.

Who is to blame? Maybe the preachers, for not coming out and telling the whole truth about what the hope really is. After all, Christ has delayed His coming for a long time, so why not play it safe, and stay on good terms with the world and its Prince (Satan, John 12:31) and still keep our faith in God? Like keeping one foot on the ground. Why become fanatical? Look where it got Jesus for talking about a kingdom “not of this world.” Like Origen, the ancient theologian who spiritualized the resurrection and brought Christian standards down to appeal to the pagan world, the modern church has managed to phrase its “theology” in such a way as to prevent any real cleavage between the Christian and the world. The popular preacher doesn’t dare say what the real end of the world is. And, therefore, he can hardly define what the real hope of the Christian is, for that would point up the doom of the world. The result is a sort of vagueness about Christ being the hope of the world, and yet the individual lives without a personal hope for himself!

AN URGENT NEED

If ever people needed to know definitely what hope is, it is now. If men ever needed to be shown the difference between belief and unbelief, it is now. If there was ever a time

when you could not serve God and mammon, that time is now. If there was ever a time when men needed to see Christians who are “as men looking for their Lord,” it is now.

If there was ever a time when men need to see that **THE DEAD GOD OF THIS WORLD IS HELPLESS TO RESCUE HIS WORSHIPPERS**, that time is now. Down with ambiguous double-talk about a hope in general, and up with plain language about the hope in particular. The time is short. Christ is coming. Whether He comes in this generation or not, **THIS** is the generation to which we must witness concerning His eternal purpose. And this generation is rapidly turning a deaf ear to the sophisticated agnosticism known as religious scholarship. “For if the trumpet gives an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?” (1 Cor. 14:8).

I hold no hope for this world, but I do hold hope in Christ. Indeed, He is the only hope anyone can ever have. He left this earth with the words, “Lo, I am with you, even until the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20): The “you,” refers to His faithful believers. Just before His death He said, “And I shall come again, and will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3): This, too, was spoken to a small band of believers.

There is hope, but only in Christ. The task of the Christian is to make it known to the world that there is no hope in the world, but only in Christ.

“In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). There is hope, not for the world, but for those who overcome it.

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