

The Blessed Hope

By

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Man has an instinctive desire for life and common sense tells him that it is fast ebbing away. Outwardly he may pretend to be self-sufficient and satisfied but inwardly he is full of fears and the desperate wish that life may not end at the grave. In times past men of western civilization have relied upon Christian concepts to calm their fears and give form to their hopes. But the church has failed modern man. In its ambition to be all things to all people, the church has failed to give any distinctive explanation to the question concerning life after death. Man is now turning to spiritualism and mysticism for the answers.

Hope or Hash. Modern churchdom offers a variety of possibilities which range all the way from reincarnation in animal bodies to a harp and a crown on cloud nine just inside St. Peter's gold-plated chain link fence. While Bible preachers and writers are careful to examine such subjects as baptism and fellowship, they seem to be willing to concede that whatever one wants to think of as a future life makes a suitable hope, as if God were going to offer 57 varieties of life in the new creation. The modern "believer" concocts his own theory on the spot, then believes that God will deliver as ordered.

On the contrary, scripture is rather explicit about man's hope—what it is and how it is attained. The apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesians might know "what is the hope" of God's calling (Eph. 1:18). He considered it of great importance that they fully understand their hope. To Titus, Paul wrote that we should be "looking for **the blessed hope** and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus the Christ" (Tit. 2:13). The apostle speaks of **the hope**, a hope which is the same for all Christians. The purpose of God is one. He does not offer us a variety of future possibilities, but reveals His intention and even demonstrated it through Christ.

Incredible still. When Jesus spoke of rising from the grave and giving life to the dead, men looked upon Him with raised eyebrows. What He was saying was incredible. "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholds the son, and believes on Him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). The apostles seemed not to understand **this hope** until Jesus Himself came forth from the grave. They then went everywhere preaching the hope of the resurrection. When Paul was arraigned before Governor Felix, he went directly to the heart of the issue saying, "touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question before you this day" (Acts 24:21). Before King Herod, he said, "And concerning **this hope**, I am accused by the Jews, O King! Why is it judged incredible with you if God does raise the dead?" (Acts 26:7-8). **The hope** the apostle preached was the resurrection of the dead.

Is hope of the resurrection still judged incredible? One reads of departed saints having gone to receive their reward, when they obviously have not been raised from the dead. Standard expressions of hope usually ignore the resurrection in favor of one's "soul going to heaven." Evangelists ask, "Where will you spend eternity?" The issue of life-

versus-death is changed to a question of “where” the spirit will live, and resurrection becomes superfluous. If all the dead saints are already flitting around in heaven with wings and harps, then the Biblical concept of the “blessed hope” is meaningless; they already have received their reward, their hope is fulfilled and the final resurrection would be just an anti-climax.

While Paul spoke of his “desire to depart, and to be with Christ,” (Phil. 1:23) he was more explicit than all the other Bible writers in declaring that the Christian’s hope would be realized in the day of resurrection. In II Tim. 4:6–8 he wrote, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” He said **NOT** that he would go to his reward at death, but that he would receive it, along with all Christians, at Christ’s second coming. “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil. 3:10–11).

Resurrection. The Bible offers no variety of hopes, but only one, a resurrection from the dead. “For if the dead are not raised, your faith is vain, you are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (I Cor. 16:16–18). **One must either be raised to immortality, or perish!**

What is meant by resurrection? David said, “My flesh also shall rest in hope. For you will not leave my life in hades, neither will you suffer your holy one to see corruption” (Psa. 16:8–11). While this prophecy refers to Christ, David believed that it also included him, for he added: “I shall be satisfied, when I awake with your likeness”(Psa. 17:15). Peter declared that Christ had been raised and had ascended to the Father, but that “David ascended not into the heavens” (Acts 2:34). David still awaits the resurrection, when he will awake in God’s image. (Read Hebrews 11 to see when the saints get to heaven.)

This is the hope Paul wrote of. “We wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus the Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself” (Phil. 3:20–21).

On the cross Christ became the representative of those who believed and died. With the penalty for sin met, the believer is redeemed from death so that he might be raised up as a sinless being and live forever. God’s purpose from the start was to have man in His own image; that is, man as a body/spirit creature, not as mere spirit only. Not only did Jesus repeat this purpose over and over but He demonstrated it after His own resurrection, when He told the apostles to see that He had flesh and bones, and was not a spirit (Luke 24:36–43). The resurrected Christ is the example of our hope. John wrote, “we shall be like him...and everyone that has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure” (I John 3:2–3).

The kingdom of God in its final state is to be a race of people who are immortal, living in a new universe, described by Peter as “a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:13). But the essential hope is not the place, but the fact of having LIFE, immortal, in the image of God.

For four hundred years before Christ the Greek Philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Pythagoras, had filled the world with their speculations about “soul immortality.” (Something not found in Scripture). Their ideal was the elimination of body to become pure spirit. Jesus and the apostles refuted this pagan myth by preaching the resurrection of the dead. Nowhere do we read of Christ making pronouncements, such as are common today, about dying and going to heaven! The passage read so often at funerals, with the suggestion that the departed has already entered a “mansion above,” is John 14:1–3). But in this text Jesus said that it is when He comes again that he will receive the saints. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself...” (Vs. 3). When He comes it will be to raise the dead. Then, and not until then, the believer will be glorified in both body and spirit and raised up to live with Christ forever. (See I Cor. 15).

The demands of Christ are great: To deny sin and self, to be totally obedient even in the face of persecution and death. But the incentive is greater. What greater incentive than this; that one whose sins are cleansed by Christ’s death should be raised from the dead in a body that is powerful, glorious, immortal and perfectly suited to God’s paradise? And what greater wonder, that, instead of the blessed hope, men are offered the mystical concept of Plato: a ghostly spirit wafting into the blue, to receive some kind of unknown award completely disassociated from that promise given by Jesus and demonstrated by His resurrection.

That day. And what of the judgment? If man is to receive his reward immediately upon death, of what purpose is a final day of judgment? For one to go to his reward immediately upon death denies the many scriptures which teach us that when Christ comes again He will raise the dead for judgment, giving immortal life to the righteous and eternal death to the lost. It is when the King comes back that He will separate the sheep from the goats, and not before! (Mt. 25:31–46). Jesus said, “The hour comes in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28–29). If the righteous have long before heard His voice and gone to their reward, and if the wicked already have suffered the punishment for sin, then there would have been no promise that this would take place in the future.

God has “appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man which He has ordained, whereof he has given assurance unto all men in that he has raised Him from the dead (Acts 17:31–32). The day is appointed. Resurrection, reward and judgment await that day!

Jesus did not teach a “built-in” immortality. Rather He held forth the promise of life, as against its opposite, death. “That whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The **BLESSED HOPE** is to live, in contrast to all “those who have **no hope**” but face final death.

Christ is the demonstration of life. As David had predicted, He was not left in the grave but arose bodily. He is not mere “spirit.” He lives and “in Him dwells the fullness of the God-head bodily” (Col. 2:9). The Christian is to be raised in the same manner in order to live—not in some ethereal world of vaporized beings—but in the body as God intended at creation.

This is the **BLESSD HOPE**, that we may be restored to life, even after death, as deathless people transformed into the likeness of Christ. This is **the hope** that challenges to Godly living, sustains one through tribulation and trial and gives real purpose to the whole scheme of things.

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