

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Anticipation of Blessedness *The Theme of Hope in I Peter*

On June 7, 1992 Pastor Steven Cole began his introductory sermon on I Peter like this. "After an extensive tour of the United States some years ago, the late, well-known German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke was asked what he saw as the greatest defect among American Christians. He replied, 'They have an inadequate view of suffering.' [Cole said] I think his observation still holds true. If it were not so, how could American Christians even give a moment's credence to the ridiculous idea that it is always God's will for believers to be healthy and wealthy? Back in the 1980s a young woman from mainland China was asked if she had heard of that teaching in [her country]. She laughed softly, shook her head, and replied, 'No, that teaching wouldn't get very far in China.' But an inadequate view of suffering is not just a problem for those who think that it's always God's will to give us a trouble-free life. I find it to be a problem among many Christians undergoing trials. Some face debilitating illness, but instead of submitting to God, they grow bitter and complain, 'Why me?' Some put up with intolerable marriages for awhile, but then bail out with the excuse, 'Don't I have a right to some happiness?' Others look back on a childhood in which they were abused and angrily complain, 'Where was God when I needed Him? What kind

of God would allow an innocent child to suffer like I did?' All these people share in common an inadequate view of suffering. Because of their bitterness toward God, they are not in submission to Him ... Others who suffer may submit to God, but it's more like glum resignation than grateful trust. They're depressed because of their problems, perhaps even to the point of suicide. [In short] they've lost hope. What all these people need is both hope and holiness in a hostile world. That is to say, they need to hear and to apply the message of I Peter" (Steven Cole, *Hope and Holiness in a Hostile World*, June 7, 1992).

With this sentence - "What all these people need is both hope and holiness in a hostile world" - Cole names the three grand themes in I Peter - **hope**, **hardship**, and **holiness**. Each of these three is so prominent and important to the message of I Peter that it merits its own sermon before we engage in our verse-by-verse exposition. Today we will be looking at the theme of hope in Peter's letter. I've titled the sermon *The Anticipation of Blessedness*. My big idea for this sermon is this: Biblical hope is always the expectation, the happy anticipation of God's grace. Christian hope is not a groundless wish for good fortune. Christian hope is not pious optimism that everything will turn out right in the end. Rather, Christian hope is "a patient, disciplined, confident waiting for and expectation of" (Colin Brown, *DoNTT*, p.243) the blessings promised in the gospel.

This element of anticipation or expectation of God's grace is certainly present in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the act of hoping is closely associated with trust in God. **Psalm 71:5**, *for Thou art my hope; O Lord God, Thou art my confidence from my youth.* **Psalm 62:5**, *my soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him.* Hope in the Old Testament is a confident anticipation that God will deal faithfully and graciously. **Psalm 42:5**, *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise*

*Him for the help of His presence. **Psalm 33:18**, Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness [or grace]. It is also in the Old Testament where we are introduced to this idea of waiting patiently upon God. **Isaiah 40:31**, Yet those who wait for (hope in) the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.*

This same emphasis is continued and even expanded as we study the New Testament word for hope. “The most frequently used and the richest in meaning in New Testament Greek are the noun, *elpis*, the verb, *elpizo* and their derivatives” (*DoNTT*, p. 238). In the New Testament this word for hope is used 31 times as a verb and 51 times as a noun. The main emphasis on hope is found in the letters of Paul. 19 of the 31 occurrences of the verb and 36 out of the 51 occurrences of the noun are in the Pauline literature. Hope is mentioned five times in I Peter (1:3, 1:13, 1:21, 3:5, and 3:15). *Elpis*, the noun, is used three times (**1:3, 21; 3:15**). *Elpizo*, the verb, appears two times (**1:13; 3:5**). My sermon this morning is organized around these five verses.

The first reference to hope is in **I Peter 1:3**, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* In the New Testament three adjectives are attached to hope. **II Thessalonians 2:16** speaks of *our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace.* **Titus 2:13** speaks of *the blessed hope.* **Hebrews 7:19** of *a better hope.* Here in **1:3** Peter tells us we are *born again to a living hope.* Notice that this new birth to a living hope is ours *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

Listen to Jonathan Edwards at this point: “It is probable that [Peter], when he wrote this, remembered how it was with him and the rest of the apostles when Christ was dead. Before, they were full of hope of being advanced with Christ in his kingdom; but when he was dead, their hopes seemed to be squashed, and dead as it were with him; but when Christ was raised to life again, so were their hopes renewed ... and their hearts filled with joy. The expression, a *living hope*, seems to suggest that as Christ since his death is alive again, so our hope – even in the face of hardship - is alive, and not dead, as the hope of the disciples was while Christ was dead. The death of Christ, without a resurrection following, might justly have [dampened] and killed the hope of all his disciples; but his resurrection revived their hearts, and renewed and everlastingly established their hopes, no more to be [dampened].”

We were ruined in Adam. Adam as our representative fell and we fell in Him. We are restored in Christ, the Second Adam. Christ as our representative paid the penalty for sin and fulfilled the just demands of the law and we are declared righteous as we are *in Him*. Christ is our Representative. We are identified *with Him*. We are *in Him*. That means that His fortunes are our fortunes. Nowhere is this more clearly taught than in **Romans 6:3-4**. *We have been baptized into His death (6:3)*. There on the hill of Golgotha we hung with Him. *We have been buried with Him (6:4)*. We were placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea with Him. And *as Christ was raised ... we too might walk in the newness of life (6:4)*. When He arose on the first day of the week we arose with Him. Our hope is *living* because Jesus Christ our Head is alive. Our hope is *living* because it is in; it is tied to the One who ever lives.

The second reference to hope is in **I Peter 1:13**, *Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your **hope** completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* Three ideas emerge in this verse. The first is that hope is a disciplined thing. This is obviously the point of *gird, keep sober, fix*. How do you know your hope is alive? According to Peter, your “hope demonstrates its living character by the steadfastness with which it waits” [on God] (*DoNTT*, p. 243).

The second idea in verse 13 is that our hope does not rest on our good works. Rather hope rests on the gracious work of God in Jesus Christ. Beloved, our hope is filled with expectation of kindness, of joy, and of unmerited favor. And this is not pie-in-the-sky stuff. Such is a reasonable expectation because God has already demonstrated Himself to be gracious to us. **Romans 8:32**, *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*

The third idea in this verse is that Christian hope is oriented to the future. The horizon of Christian hope extends through our present circumstances all the way into eternity. This is the key to our endurance. **Romans 8:24-25**, *For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.* That Christian hope is geared to the future is all over I Peter. Let’s look at a few selected verses together. **I Peter 1:4-5**, *to obtain **an inheritance** which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, **reserved in heaven for you**, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready **to be revealed in the last time**.* **I Peter 1:7**, *that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory*

and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. I Peter 1:13, Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:12, Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. I Peter 4:5, but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. I Peter 4:7, the end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. I Peter 4:13, but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. I Peter 5:1, therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed. I Peter 5:4, and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. I Peter 5:6, humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. I Peter 5:10, and after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

The third reference to hope is in **I Peter 1:20-21**, *For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you* ²¹ *who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.* In this verse Peter links our faith to our hope. Faith, hope, and love are often referred to as “theological virtues” because they are so clearly rooted in the New Testament (Kerr, *EDoT*, p. 1146; Harper, *Beacon*, p. 480). “None of them can exist without the others. There can be no hope without faith in Christ, for hope is rooted in him alone. Faith without hope would, by itself, be empty and futile” (*DoNTT*, p. 242).

II Corinthians 1:20 assures us that *all the promises of God are “yes” in Jesus Christ*. Christian hope is the anticipation, the expectation of the blessed benefits that are promised in the gospel. Faith emphasizes assurance (**Heb. 11:1**) while hope emphasizes the anticipation of the things promised us. “Hope is the expectation that all God’s promises to us and for us will (soon) be realized. It is trusting – and waiting – on God” (*Beacon*, p. 265).

In my reading this week a connection was pointed out to me that I had not made before. It has to do with the connection of faith and hope. Faith emphasizes assurance (**Heb. 11:1**) while hope emphasizes the anticipation of the things we believe. Earlier in our service we confessed our faith using the Nicene Creed. Most likely the majority of us understood that element of worship to be a corporate recitation, proclamation, and affirmation of what it is we, as Christians, actually believe. But confessions of faith are more than that. You see, not only did we confess our faith but in doing so we also confessed our hope. We gave expression to our anticipation of blessedness. We said together, “And He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom will have no end.” We said together, “And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

The fourth reference to hope is in **I Peter 3:5**, *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who **hoped** in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands*. In this verse Peter drops hope right in our laps. Hope barrels through the front door and takes a seat on our sofa. Hope is interjected into our the most intimate and fundamental relationship – marriage itself. Peter is saying that hope gives shape and substance to every dimension of our lives. Hope calls us to courage in the face of testing. Hope calls us to holiness because of the

expectation of meeting God. Since hope anticipates the blessings that will be experienced at the revelation of Christ, it enables us to live in accordance with heavenly, eternal values rather than in accordance with the values (desires) of the culture around us. Peter is suggesting that hope is critical to living properly.

The fifth and final reference to hope is found in **I Peter 3:15**, *but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the **hope** that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.* It seems that hope as used in this verse has a dual meaning. The first has to do with hope as an attitude. "New Testament hope is a patient, disciplined, confident waiting for and expectation of the Lord as our Savior" (*DoNTT*, p. 243). We are buoyed up, moved along in the way of righteousness by hope. Hope demonstrates its living character by the steadfastness with which it waits, by the patient bearing of the tension between the way things are and the way they shall be. Those who hope are comforted and confident. Hoping is also a joyful waiting on God. **Romans 12:10-12**, *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation.*

The other meaning has to do with the content of our hope. I have suggested that Biblical hope is always the expectation, the happy anticipation of God's grace. I have suggested that Christian hope is "a patient, disciplined, confident waiting for and expectation of" (Colin Brown, *DoNTT*, p.243) the blessings promised in the gospel. What then are those gospel blessings that we anticipate? Let's rejoice together as we rehearse what is in store for us. **Acts 23:6**, *But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"* **Romans 5:1-2**, *Therefore having been justified by faith, we*

have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Galatians 5:5, For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. Ephesians 1:18-19, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. Colossians 1:5, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel. Colossians 1:23, if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. I Thessalonians 5:8, But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. Titus 1:1-2, Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, ² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago. Titus 2:13, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. Titus 3:7, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Biblical hope is always the expectation, the happy anticipation of God's grace. Peter will argue in no uncertain terms that it is this hope in and for these gospel blessings alone that will sustain you in hardship.