

Christian's Hope

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[1 Peter 1:3-5] Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1. What is Our Hope?

We are in autumn, the season of harvesting. Farmers planted seeds in spring and toiled in summer in caring for the crops to grow and bear fruits in the hope of a bountiful harvest in the fall. They work hard for their farm work because of the belief and hope in their hearts that the earth they toil on will bring certain fruits to their benefit in due time. Their hope is a living hope because it is based on the solid faith of believing in the power and everlasting history of God's creation, through which God gave the power of growth and reproduction in the seeds of all living creatures He created. There is great joy on the harvest day when the farmers bring in their bountiful harvest into their storage. Thus, the payback of farmers' labor of hope is the harvest in autumn.

Similarly, butterflies lay eggs, which are transformed into caterpillars, which are then transformed into the chrysalis, out of which emerges full-grown butterflies, which fly away into the sky flapping their beautiful wings. The lifecycle of a butterfly exemplifies the transformation of a sinner into a born-again Christian, who moves to the kingdom of heaven when life on earth is over. Because God has implanted into butterflies the miraculous nature that the crawling caterpillars turn into flying butterflies, they keep on producing caterpillars. The transformation of caterpillars into butterflies is a living hope because of the power of God built into their bodies.

We have a hope to inherit "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" as the apostle Paul declared above. Before we come to know and believe in Jesus as our Savior, we are like the caterpillars that crawl on the earth. The gospel of Jesus Christ, however, gives us the hope of being transformed into a holy body and a divine nature here on earth and a resurrected body in heaven.

2. Why Must We have Hope?

Why do Christians have their hope in heaven and not on earth? In the present world, we can enjoy the benefits of marvelous scientific and technological innovations that provide convenience, productivity, and ease and comfort of life. The world leaders constantly preach the grandiose picture of a unified new world that promises affluence, disease-free healthy living, pollution-free natural environment, conflict-free peaceful world order, and hunger and carefree living for all peoples. They also preach the desirability of a unified religious order where people are free to worship any god of choice without interference. Despite this amazing picture of the 'New World Order,' why do true Christians discard it and rather choose to walk in the narrow way of Jesus Christ with dogged persistence, which seems foolish to the rest of the world? We need to examine our heart's motive in our profession. What causes us to keep on having our hope in heaven and unwavering loyalty in the truth of Jesus Christ?

The first reason why we must have our hope in Heaven is that the 20th and the 21st centuries of human history, which was led on through human reasoning and rational scientific endeavors, have been a huge failure. Modern human history has been filled with an endless stream of natural and human disasters including multiple major wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Middle East War, the Anti-terror War (which was terminated only recently), famine in most continents, a series of global epidemics including the current on-going COVID-19, the spread and collapse of the communist ideology that resulted in a hundred million human casualties and deprivation of individual liberties, the unrest and military tension resulting from the recent U.S.-China conflict, widening economic gap between the rich and the poor, and the widespread environmental pollution, just to name a few.

These disasters and conflicts have proven that we cannot have our hope in human reasoning and scientific solutions to national and global issues and conflicts. The human endeavors to resolve those issues during the past number of centuries have been total failures despite the well-meaning efforts of the world's most renowned leaders and thinkers. Instead of improving the conditions, the darkness in the world has been increasing on all continents. Suicide rates are in increasing trends all over the world. The suicide rate of South Korea, despite the country being the 10th largest economy in the world, is the highest among OECD nations. Suicide is the second biggest factor in the deaths of young people in the U.S. Despite the modern conveniences and increasing wealth in developed nations, people are unhappy in most nations. The ideological division among different factions has pitted the groups with fierce mutual hatred and animosity. That is why we must have our hope in Heaven instead of on the earth.

The second reason why we must have our hope in Jesus Christ is that death takes away all of our possessions when it comes to us. For this reason, we must find a lasting solution for our souls beyond death. In Luke 12 our Lord Jesus pointed out the futility of our souls no matter how much our earthly possessions might be if we do not have hope in God through Jesus.

[Luke 12: 20-21] "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

The third reason why we must have our hope in the everlasting kingdom of heaven is that the Creator God has prepared wonderful inheritance that will last through eternity and is calling us to share it through Jesus Christ. The rich inheritance that God has in store for us is beyond our imagination. And He is inviting us to possess it.

[1 Corinthians 2:9] However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him— these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, when the repentant son returns home to his father, the father never mentions any of the wrong things the son has done. But he has the ragged, filthy son washed and have new clothes put on, put a ring on his finger, give a new pair of shoes on his bruised feet, and have a fat calf butchered for a feast of welcome. The repentant son only wished that the father would consider him as one of the servants in the household. He certainly did not expect this wonderful welcome that he did not deserve.

3. Why Is Hope Available to Us?

Being sinners, how is it that we are allowed to hope to inherit the wonderful gifts and inheritance of God? The first reason why we can do so is that our Savior Jesus has triumphed. He triumphed when He was tested by Satan in the Judean wilderness, He triumphed throughout His 3.5 years of ministry of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God to the poor and afflicted people of Israel, He triumphed in the garden of Gethsemane when He prayed that God's will be done through the impending ordeal of suffering and death on the cross, He triumphed through the totally unjust trials, cruel violence on His body, then finally He triumphed on Calvary, thus culminating a life dedicated to His mission as the Savior of this sinful world, bearing all of our sins on His shoulders while He was sinless despite being tested in all points as we are. For this very reason, we the sinners are allowed to have hope in the salvation of our souls and the eternal life with Him in Heaven.

The second reason why the hope in Heaven is available to us sinners is that we can become the spiritual descendants of Abraham through our faith in Jesus Christ so that we become co-heirs with the Jewish people in the blessings that God promised to Abraham. When Abraham offered up his son Isaac to God on top of Mt. Moriah, God gave the following promise of blessing to him through an angel:

[Genesis 22: 15-18] Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore, and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed My voice."

God granted this promise of blessings because He saw the living faith in Abraham's heart, which was lived out in his actions. The phrase "your seed" in verse 18 is singular and it points to Jesus Christ, who was born as a descendant of Abraham. The apostle Paul declares that, when we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, we become partakers in the inheritance granted to Abraham by God through this promise.

[Galatians 3: 26-29] For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Finally, the third reason why we are allowed to have a living hope in God's inheritance is that God is a faithful God who never changes. God has never been negligent or forgetful in fulfilling His promises. All prophecies of God spoken through His prophets have been fulfilled in times past. Therefore, we can fully believe that His promises for the future will also be fulfilled without fail.

[Deuteronomy 7:9] "Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

We, humans, make promises but easily forget them or neglect to keep them. But, God is faithful to all who love Him and are loyal to Him. The omniscient God foresees our failures beforehand, but He has nevertheless presented His marvelous promise of blessing to His people unilaterally and without reciprocal benefits from us other than our obedience and loyalty. God has fulfilled all of His promises despite the people's failures, and He will continue to keep His promises in the coming years. And that is an excellent reason why having our hope in God's promises is a worthwhile thing to do.

4. Is the 'Day of Hope' Near?

The day when our hope is fulfilled is called the Lord's Day in the Bible. It refers to the end-times as more commonly known. The end times will not be the end of the earth or the world, but it will mean the end of God's Grace Period and the end of the New Testament church era. Before this end-times commences, the bride church of Christ will have been raptured to Heaven to participate in the wedding ceremony with the bridegroom Christ. This is the ultimate hope of all true Christians. I'd like to cite the following seven indications that tell us we are nearing the end-times. They are signs that help us solidify our hope in Heaven.

- 1) Rapid propagation of moral depravity: We are seeing an ever-increasing level of sexual, moral, and ethical depravity and corruption; the universal acceptance of LGBT+ decadence, widespread occurrence of violence and general disregard of human lives including those of unborn babies, and increasing human trafficking, particularly of children and underage young adults. These phenomena are very similar to those in Noah's era before the Great Flood.

[Matt 24:36-39] "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day

that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

- 2) The rapid growth of the travel industry and the phenomenal development of the IT industry

[Daniel 12:4] "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase."

The prophet Daniel foresaw that many people will move about, that is, the increase in the global human traffic volume as well as the increase in the information/ knowledge spread. Daniel's prophecy has certainly been fulfilled since the 20th century due to the rapid developments in the aerospace industry and the information technology areas.

- 3) Iran has become the leading antagonist among the Islamist middle east countries, vowing to wipe away Israel from the face of the earth. For this purpose, Iran has endeavored to develop nuclear weapons despite the U.S. policy of preventing it and the Israeli actions to remove such a threat to their existence. Iran, formerly Persia, is mentioned in the apocalyptic prophecies as one of the nations that will invade to destroy Israel in the end-times.
- 4) Recovery of Jerusalem and the preparations for the Third Temple construction: The Six-Day War in 1967 brought Jerusalem into Israeli control, which indicates fulfillment of this event. Also, the Temple Institute in Jerusalem was established and has nearly completed the preparations for the construction of the Third Temple in Jerusalem. The reestablishment of daily Temple worship is a requirement for the end-times period.

[Luke 21:24] And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

What does it mean "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"? I believe it indicates the shift of God's focus from the Gentiles to the Jewish people. That is, until 1967 the Christian evangelical activities had been focused on the Gentiles with virtually no endeavors spent for proselyting the Jewish people into the fold of the New Testament church. Since the recovery of Jerusalem in 1967, however, there arose the 'Messianic Jews' movement, where the Jews are drawn to the belief in Jesus Christ as their Savior, while these Jews, who are now Christians but wish to retain their Jewish traditions. This movement has seen tremendous growth since its birth so that we now have some 20,000 Messianic Jews in Israel and over 200,000 in the U.S. and these numbers are rapidly increasing. We are confident that Lord Jesus is behind this movement as His prophecy is being fulfilled.

- 5) Depravity of the church: The apparent falling away of the churches from the truth of Jesus Christ is a strong sign of the end-times being near. Churches are so focused on the quantitative growth of their congregation so that church services have become entertainment venues similar to nightclubs. Many churches have forsaken the doctrine of 'Jesus Only' as the only way of salvation. They have united as a unified false church dedicated to serving the Antichrist, soon to appear.

[2 Thessalonians 2:3-4] Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

- 6) Lack of interest in end-times: Most pastors today do prefer not to speak on the topic of the end-times. And there is a strong tendency among Christians to regard talks about the end-times as a taboo. For this reason, there are not many who speak on the rapture, which is the hope of all true Christians. A vague reference to Heaven as our final destination constitutes the closest handling of the apocalypse as serious biblical discourse. Because the pastors shy away from the end-time talks, the lay Christians follow their example and are confused and misinformed about the end-times.

[Matt 24:50] the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of,

[Luke 21:34-35] For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

- 7) The Chinese Communist Party, led by Xi Jinping, has been causing significant unrest and conflict among nations of the world because of their ambition of becoming the world's hegemon over the U.S. The spreading of COVID-19, intentionally propagated by the CCP. In addition, the increasing frequency of volcanic activities globally and natural disasters, are driving the peoples of the world into a high level of unrest, psychological stress, and health risks. Lord Jesus warned us that these things must occur before the beginning of the end-time sorrows.

[Matt 24: 7-8] For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

5. Our True Hope

The hope of all true Christians is not in life here on earth but Heaven. This world is not our true home. As Abraham looked toward the heavenly city and lived on earth as a stranger and pilgrim, the New Testament Christians likewise live on with our hope in Heaven because we are citizens of the heavenly city. Our Father God, however, has not left us by ourselves but given us unspeakable blessings through the Holy Spirit, who trains us, encourages us, strengthens us, and guides us each day as we submit ourselves to His divine care and nurturing. The day of the clarion call of the rapture is coming near when we will be traveling up toward the clouds where the Lord Jesus will be meeting us and taking us to the heavenly city. There we will march into the gloriously prepared wedding venue where we will be wed to our Bridegroom Christ as His bride. Until then, let us be diligent in encouraging, loving, and strengthening one another in preparing to meet our Lord.

[Revelation 22:20] He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!