



The Hope of Salvation

We generally think of the division of the human race into the two antithetical camps of belief and unbelief. This is the outcome of the divine initiative in grace. God sent forth his only begotten Son into the world with a saving intention (John 3:17). This reality necessarily elicits a response, faith or unbelief. The person who puts faith in Christ escapes all condemnation, while the one who refuses to trust in Jesus comes under the judgment of God (John 3:18). Faith, or a lack thereof, is decisive for eternity.

Hope Within Us

The New Testament contemplates this antithesis from another perspective as well. On the one hand, people without faith "have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). Believers in Christ, on the other hand, have what Peter calls "the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). In the first century, hope sustained the Christian, while many lived without the confident anticipation of a better day to come.

This sober reality of the ancient world continues into the present. The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre affirmed that man is a "useless passion," underscoring his position that our lives in this world are pointless because death brings an end to our existence. We as Christians conversely are firmly convinced that the future will bring a better day. We are the men and women of faith in the Lord, but we are also people with hope as we look to the future (Rom. 8:25).

Paul regarded hope as having central importance. He included it among the three cardinal virtues, standing with the elite qualities of faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3). While faith in Christ and love for the saints were matters for which Paul gave thanks to God, he nevertheless expressed his desire that new converts to the Lord would advance beyond their faith and love to the point where they would "know what is the hope of his calling" (Eph. 1:18). The call of God brings hope into our lives, and Paul wanted the saints of God to know what the Christian hope is.

The Blessed Hope

Our hope focuses upon the return of Christ, "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." The coming of the Lord is what Paul identifies as "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). It is the hope that brings happiness and joy to the believer. It is therefore a major characteristic in the life of the person who has "turned to God." We are those who not only "serve the living and true God" but also "wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, that is Jesus" (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

We wait with eagerness for the day of triumph, the day in which the "Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God" (1 Thess. 4:16).

Future Salvation

Why do we contemplate Jesus' coming with happiness and delight? It is because we have put on "the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). We recognize that with respect to the Day of the Lord, "God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9).

Our salvation is grounded in eternity, for God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4). From another point of view, we were

saved at the cross: "In him we have redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1:7). From still another standpoint, salvation comes to us "after listening to the message of salvation." "Having also believed," we were "sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). From a final perspective, our salvation will come to us in the future. God has "destined us" for "obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9).

Component Parts

What exactly will this entail? We are destined to escape the wrath of God that will be unveiled in the Day of Judgment (Rom. 2:5-6; 1 Thess. 5:9), but there is more to it than that. It also means that we will experience complete conformity to Christ the Son of God (Rom. 8:29). "We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is" (1 John 3:2). Our conformity will be in soul and in body, both moral and physical, even intellectual and emotional. Conformity will bring perfection to every aspect of our humanity. Thus "we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Looking Forward

The hope given to us in the gospel of grace means that we ought to have a forward orientation in our lives. Let us be like Paul, who directed his thoughts to the future. It was his intention, as he contemplated the day of eschatological judgment, to "be found in him—to be found by God in a state of union with Jesus Christ. In such a condition, he would be the man "not having a righteousness" of his own "derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9).

The possession of the righteousness of God would mean that Paul would indeed "attain to the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:11). As one who received "the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness; he would "reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). He would be part of the great messianic assembly, the people of God who would "always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17), the congregation that "will live together with him; enjoying the sweetness of his love and fellowship" (1 Thess. 5:10).

It is no wonder that Paul compared himself with a runner in a foot race who would not look back, "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13). Paul lived as a man with a goal. His energies were ever directed to the obtaining of a prize like no other. In Scripture, we still hear him speak: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ" (Phil. 3:14).

Personal Application

How then do you and I spend our days? Do we look past "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4) to that which is to come? Are we able to say with Peter and the believers of the first century that "we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13)?

The example of Paul stands before us: "I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12). Are we willing to embrace the same perspective, placing the longing of our hearts upon the hope of salvation? The apostle invites us to so: "Let us therefore, as many as are mature, have this attitude" (Phil. 3:15).

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