

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Love, Faith and Hope in the Psalms: Psalm 24 - Hope

We used to have a poster in my office at work that said: “In the interests of economy, management have switched off the light at the end of the tunnel”. It raised a smile; but life without hope is not the least bit amusing. Paul described the Ephesians, before they were saved, as “Having no hope, and without God in the world”. What a striking description of the empty and aimless lives of those who do not know Christ as Saviour! No wonder people fill up their lives with anything that can distract them from the futility of life without God. When human beings have their eyes fixed firmly on some cherished hope, it is staggering what they can endure, physically and psychologically. But as soon as hope is “switched off”, we collapse in on ourselves and the slightest effort is beyond us. People without hope quickly become angry and bitter, or simply withdraw into despair and sorrow. Very sadly, many have ended their own lives because they have lost all hope. Hope is an absolute essential for a happy and fulfilled life.

Christianity is sometimes dismissed as “pie in the sky when you die”; a false hope, a system of wishful thinking to sooth the gullible and comfort the faint hearted. It is portrayed as something to keep our minds off the harsh realities of life that we cannot, or will not, face.

This overlooks two fundamental points:

1. The reality of the Christian hope
2. The radical effects of the Christian hope

1. The reality of the Christian hope

Christianity is not a fairy tale. It is not a day dream with an impossibly happy ending that can never happen. If it was, it would be the worst kind of confidence trick and thoroughly despicable. Christianity is based on facts. The **fact** of Jesus’ birth and life in this world. The **facts** of His Godhood and Manhood. The **fact** of His death, foreshadowed in Psalm 22. The **fact** of His resurrection, foretold in Psalm 22 again. The **fact** of His present care for His own, pictured in Psalm 23 and the **fact** of His coming again, foretold in Psalm 24. If we have trusted Him as our Saviour, we are connected with Him **now** in His death and resurrection and **will** be connected with Him in His coming again and reigning. Isaac Watts wrote:

*“Jesus shall reign where e’er the sun,
Doth His successive journeys run.
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore”.*

This is what Psalm 24 looks forward to. Over the last two weeks we have thought about His suffering love expressed in Psalm 22, and the path of faith we walk with Him in Psalm 23. In Psalm 24 we are carried forward to the day when the hopes of all believers past, present and future will be fulfilled. We sometimes forget that God is all powerful and lives, outside time, in eternity.

When the weather girl tells me what the weather was like yesterday I can be sure the facts are accurate. When she tells me what it will be like tomorrow, I have some confidence in what she says, but know there is some margin for error. If she tells me what the weather will be like next month, I know she is guessing! It is not like that with God. God’s statements about yesterday, today, tomorrow and one thousand years from now, are 100% guaranteed accurate. Psalm 22 was fulfilled at Calvary and we see the accuracy of it. We can prove the resources promised in Psalm 23 here and now today. Psalm 24 is yet to be fulfilled but we can rely on what it foretells with absolute certainty because, like all Scripture, it comes from the all powerful God who knows all things and cannot lie. Robert Murray M’Cheyne described the prophecies of the Bible as “History that is yet to be”. In other words, they are not predictions or speculative visions of what **might** be, but solid facts that are no less certain just because they have not yet taken place. So when we look forward to Christ’s return and glorious reign it is not like waiting for our lottery numbers to come up, a forlorn hope with little realistic chance of success! We are like a runner who keeps pressing on knowing that the end is within sight and it is foolish to slow down or give up now. Now is the time for a finishing sprint! Pressing on to a certain and wonderful goal is not “pie in the sky”; it is simple common sense. We would be short sighted fools if we failed to do so.

2. The Radical Effects of Hope

Hope fundamentally changes the way I behave now. I have already commented that a lack of hope is totally disabling and destructive. A bright hope picks me up and starts me moving again. But I am not just discussing an abstract idea of hope or suggesting that hope in any dream is all that is necessary. The nature of the hope is very important. Christians are not meant to hope for the achievement of a better world by human efforts or even by the spread of the Gospel. Great though the Gospel is, and wonderful though its effects on individual lives can be, we do not hope for a kingdom brought in by the Gospel. We wait for a kingdom brought in by a coming King. Let me try and illustrate the effects this hope should have.

Imagine for a moment I am planning to emigrate. I am recording this message in England where I have lived all my life, so I am used to my fair share of rain, wind and cold. Let us say I plan to move to Spain. I have been dreaming of it for years; the thought has helped me keep going through many drab English winters, and very soon my dreams will be realised. What will I be doing? I will be buying lots of new clothes, lighter and cooler, better suited to the new climate. I will have to start learning a new language. I will also want to learn more of the geography, culture and history of my new home country. Converting all my money from pounds to euros and perhaps making changes in my diet will need addressing too. Do you see the application? If my hopes are centred in Christ and His home, it will radically alter my outlook and behaviour in this world. Everything: how I speak; how I spend my time and money; what I read and learn about; all will change.

In Romans 12:12, in the middle of a very practical passage about Christian character and behaviour, Paul speaks about “Rejoicing in hope”. The expression is sandwiched between “Serving the Lord” and “Patient in tribulation”. I am sure it is strongly connected to both. If the hope is so real to me that I am indeed “rejoicing” in it, the result is bound to be serving the Lord with renewed enthusiasm and pleasure. If the Lord, for reasons that He alone may know, sends me tribulation, then my rejoicing in hope will make me patient in the tribulation because I will see that it can only be temporary, while my hope is eternal.

Hope seen in Psalm 24

Christ Jesus **has** to reign. The world belongs to Him because He made it. Psalm 24:1-2 say, “The earth is the LORD’S and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters.” So Jesus has a right to the throne because He is the creator.

The throne of this world also belongs to Him because he is perfectly just and righteous, as we find in verses 3-4: “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up His soul to an idol nor sworn deceitfully”. The Lord Jesus alone has the necessary characteristics to reign as an absolute ruler. We are only too aware of the problems that arise because of the failings of kings, presidents and prime ministers. They fail because of their lack of wisdom, or are hounded out of office because of some scandal. Sometimes they are ousted by somebody more powerful than themselves. None of these failings will ever be found in the perfect King, Christ Jesus. Absolute rulers have a very bad track record in human history, both in Bible times and more recently. They may begin well, with high ideals and good intentions, but corruption of some kind soon appears and, before long, cruelty and tyranny take over from benevolence and peace. It seems that the expression ‘power corrupts’ is true of all human rulers. Even David, the author of this psalm, and the one described as “a man after God’s own heart” used His position to steal a man’s wife and then murder her husband. The world waits for a ruler who will always and only judge with wisdom and perfect justice and use his power only for good. The only person who can fulfil these criteria is Jesus Christ.

He does not assume power on His own authority; He is appointed by God. Listen to verse 5, “He shall receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of His salvation.” Before Christ’s earthly reign, the world will accept a ruler who comes in his own name as the Lord himself said in John 5:43, “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me. If another comes in his own name, him you will receive”. This is the “man of sin” mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 who “exalts himself”. He will bring peace for a time, and be acclaimed as a great deliverer, but his real character will soon become evident and the greatest troubles ever seen in the world will rapidly follow. The king raised up by Satan and chosen by men stands in direct and stark contrast to God’s chosen King.

The Lord Jesus comes from God’s earthly people as their Messiah. Verse 6 says, “This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face. Selah”. God chose the nation of Israel as His special people long ago. He declared that the Saviour of the world would come from that nation and we know that this was the case. God also made promises to David, promises, like those made to Abraham, which depend solely on God, and are not conditional on human obedience. God swore to David that his family would have an everlasting line of rulers. Human failure has meant that no son of David has ruled for many, many years but God’s promise demands that David’s son will sit upon an everlasting throne and set up an everlasting kingdom. The one we sometimes sing about as “Great David’s greater

Son” shall do exactly that. The man Christ Jesus, who was nailed on a cross and crowned with thorns, will reign alone and reign supreme, seated on David’s throne, with the crown of the whole earth on His head. It **must** be so. God’s chosen One must have the honour and glory that belong to Him and this world has to have a ruler who is utterly fair and just. The world, both political and physical, cannot be put right by human schemes or organisation. It will be put perfectly in order by the one referred to in Ezekiel 21:27. This verse quotes God, referring to the throne of Israel, as saying “Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown... Until He comes, whose right it is, and I will give it to Him”.

This is the true character of Christian hope. It is not hoping for a better world or peace in the next world. It isn’t even hoping for a home in heaven, though that will be ours. The Christian hope is a certain looking forward to a day when our Lord will receive all that belongs to Him. We look forward to His glory, not ours. Considering what things will be like then will revolutionise our priorities and actions now. Who wants to buy a car or computer that will be replaced by a new model next week? Who wants to build a house on land that will be washed away by the sea in the next six months? Who would spend all their energies and care on things that will be gone in a few years at most, when we can invest all we have in things that will stand for all eternity? We may be well aware of these things as Bible teachings but we must ask ourselves what the reality of them is in our every day lives. We need to listen to Peter’s exhortation in 2 Peter 3:11, “Since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?” If we concentrate on trying to be less materialistic and less focussed on the here and now, we will struggle badly. God encourages us to focus on Him and the future He has planned. That way we will find that we are naturally less occupied with this world because we are far too busy with things that give us much more satisfaction.

Let’s return to our Psalm and, commencing at verse 7, listen to the herald of that great victory: “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in!”. “Who is this King of glory?” ask some, wondering what great person deserves this tremendous fanfare. Not now the humble Jesus of Nazareth but, “The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle”. This is the very same Jesus, but now seen in an altogether different light from when He was first on earth. The herald speaks again, “Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in”. The question is repeated, “Who is this King of glory?” The answer clearly equates the Lord Jesus with the God revealed in the Old Testament, “The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah”. It is important to grasp the fact that the Jehovah (or LORD) of the Old Testament, is the same person as the Jesus of the New Testament. This is just what the religious leaders of Jesus’ day would not accept. They knew that there was only one God and would not accept that the man standing in front of them was their God, the Jehovah they claimed to worship. We need to be clear that Jesus Christ is the Eternal God and that the God seen in the Old Testament is not some primitive deity, to be replaced by a more refined concept of God, given in the New Testament, but one and the same Person.

The psalm we have been considering is a wonderful climax to this group of three psalms. What a distance we have covered from One forsaken of God in Psalm 22:1 to One ruling in absolute power at the end of Psalm 24. Never let us forget that this is the same person, and that without His suffering, death and resurrection the thought of Him reigning would be an absolute terror to us. An all powerful, all seeing, perfectly just ruler, may sound appealing in the abstract but it is no comfort to guilty sinners. Before we could rejoice in the prospect of His coming as a hope, He had to remake us like Himself.

Let us rejoice in the fact that the Lord that we love and serve will, one day soon, receive great glory and praise in the world that rejected Him. May this hope energise us to live our lives for Him, day by day, until He comes!

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