

## **The Lord of Hope**

*Jonathan Gallagher*

### **Who wants to live forever?**

“*Who wants to live forever*” sang British rock group Queen in 1986, voicing the fatalistic pointlessness of so many. Theirs was a rhetorical question--because for them, who *would* want to live forever? No one...

And surely if living forever meant eternal life in this world *as it is*, then who would disagree?

- Who would want an eternity in this sin-sick, despairing, perverted world?
- Who would want ‘life’ that would be the curse of living death?
- Who would want a never-ending experience of evil, hatred and self-destruction?

Such an “eternal life” would be more like the eternal hell of Greek mythology, with the accursed doomed to meaningless suffering, endlessly repeated:

Like Sisyphus, deviously clever King of Corinth, condemned to roll a huge boulder up a hill, only to have it repeatedly roll back down again.

Like Tantalus, a son of Zeus punished for stealing divine secrets, eternally consigned to stand in water that receded every time he tried to drink, and never able to reach luscious bunches of fruit that moved out of reach as he stretched to eat.

Like Prometheus, the fire-stealing Titan, sentenced to be chained to a rock and there repeatedly eaten alive by an eagle by day, while his body regrew at night.

A terrifying vision of eternal pain and pointlessness; an endless extension of this evil world.

### **Checkout time?**

So who? Who wants to live forever? Not seeing any way out except death, nothing better than non-existence, not finding any Answers to the Questions: all that is left is the nothingness exit of suicide. Nobody wants to live forever, and even if they were to hear the truth, they would simply shake their heads and turn away. Just the bleak depressive assertion of The Eagles *Hotel California*: “You can check out any time you like, But you can never leave...”

*How wrong can you be!* For if to live forever means an eternity in God’s presence; the promise of a recreated humanity; the happiness of a transformed society; the assurance of an earth made new, a place where only righteousness dwells and every being freely chooses good--what then?

### **God’s hope for the born dying**

Ah then! Who wants to live forever? Who wouldn’t? And that *is* the offer God makes to all who

will come to Him for healing salvation! That's the answer to the pointlessness of our existence on our own. That's the reason for our very lives--to run home to our loving, creating Heavenly Father. That's the hope of us who are born dying--the hope of eternal life.

God's hope for our hopelessness, hope that is sure and certain, a hope that is based on the cast-iron guarantee of God himself. This is THE HOPE!

I remember conducting the graveside service in the rain of a member who had lived a long and fulfilled life, and had fallen asleep in his Loving Lord Jesus. While there were the tears of separation and the sense of loss, the mourners showed their trusting hope in the Lord of the Resurrection.

What a contrast with another interment close by. With shriekings and wailings this group grieved as those who have no hope. As far as they were concerned, this was it: life was over and the one they loved was forever gone. This is when and where the Christian message really makes a difference. In hospitals and at bedsides I have had many talks with those who have expected death. In the fragility of our lives, only God's hope can make a difference.

As the saying goes, there are no atheists in the trenches. When faced with the awesomeness of death and the pointlessness of life, then we seek for hope and assurance.

### **The meaning of hope**

So what of hope? What does hope mean? "I hope you'll understand me. I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow. I hope I'll find a good job." Hope in the sense of faint expectation--I would like it to be possible, it probably won't, but I still "hope". Is Christian hope that kind of watered-down-vagueness that characterizes so much of this world's hope?

But first look at the way the world sees hope. What do people say? Think of some proverbs describing hope:

### **Proverbial Hope**

"Where there's life there's hope."  
"Hope for the best and prepare for the worst."  
"Hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper".  
"Hope is the poor man's bread."  
"Who lives by hope will die by hunger."  
"Too much hope deceives."  
"He that lives in hope dances to an ill tune."  
"Hopers go to hell"!!

Varying views on hope there--and mainly disparaging. Seeing hope as a substitute for reality, as deceitful and unwise. Is that the *Christian* hope? I *hope* not!!

### **Literary Hope**

What of the world's great writers. What have they got to say about hope? A mixed bunch this, but not very hopeful...

Alexander Pope did say "Hope springs eternal in the human breast" but not whether that was a good idea. Aristotle commented that "Hope is a waking dream" which hardly makes hope something you rely on. The Latin writer Gracian went further: "Hope is a great falsifier of the truth"; while the German philosopher Nietzsche was sure hope was totally bad: "Hope in reality is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torment of man."

## **Christian Hope**

So much for such views of hope. Looks more like total hopelessness to me! Let's look again and find out about the *absolute reality* of Christian hope. What kind of hope are we talking about here? What is it? On what is it based?

If you are promised something, you hope that the promise will be fulfilled. On what do you base your hopefulness? On the person who promises it. If I promise to come and visit you, would you expect me? What if you promised to visit me? Depends on our record, doesn't it, and what exactly is promised. And our hope is eternal life, which is promised by God. What kind of person is God? Does he make false promises? Can he lie? No--how ridiculous to even suggest that!! So the promise is sure, our hope is not wishy-washy and uncertain. It is an absolutely *sure and certain* hope.

This is the fundamental motivation and objective of the Christian. It gives us a reason for living, it gives us a direction where we're going. Without this hope we're lost.

## **Biblical Hope**

Look at how the Bible explains the true meaning of hope--

- The Lord Jesus Christ which is our **hope**. (1 Timothy 1:1)
- For in this **hope** we were saved. But **hope** that is seen is no **hope** at all. Who **hopes** for what he already has? But if we wait for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Romans 8:25,28 NIV)
- Christ in you the **hope** of glory. (Colossians 1:27)
- Rejoicing in **hope**. (Romans 12:12)
- We rejoice in the **hope** of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)
- We have put our **hope** in the living God, who is the saviour of all men. (1 Timothy 4:10 NIV)
- On him we have set our **hope**. (2 Corinthians 1:10 NIV)
- We have this **hope** as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. (Hebrews 6:19 NIV)

- Therefore, since we have such a **hope**, we are very bold. (2 Corinthians 3:12 NIV)
- Looking for that blessed **hope**, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:13)
- The **hope** that is laid up for us in heaven. (Colossians 1:5)
- I have the same **hope** in God... that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (Acts 24:15 NIV)
- The **hope** of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time. (Titus 1:2 NIV)
- By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we **hope**. (Galatians 5:5 NIV)
- **Hope** to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13)
- In his [God's] great mercy he has given us new birth into a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)
- May the God of **hope** fill you...so that you may overflow with **hope**. (Romans 15:13 NIV)

How amazing and central this hope. Romans 8:24 even says that “We are saved by hope”! How definite and assured this hope is. Do you begin to see the *meaning* of this hope that is centred on the Almighty God Himself. If you do not have this hope, how can you face the future, how can you live in the present?

### **Who is this God of Hope?**

But such hope centred on God will be very dependent on the kind of God you hope in!

I remember speaking to a young lady in church. Hopes broken, dreams shattered, she had asked to see me. She sat without speaking for some time. Then:

“I don’t hope any more.” She turned her face away, eyelids closing. “There’s nothing left. I’ve tried it all...”

“But...”

“But nothing. Listen--I know you’re a minister, but there’s nothing you can tell me that will make any difference. Especially about God. No hope there. None at all.”

The swirling chords of the organ moved between us, preventing a response. Not that she was listening anyway. Just sitting there in the church as the organist practised for the chorale.

Eventually she went on:

“Oh--I know He’s there. I know He’s watching me. And I know He’s going to get me. *That’s* why I have no hope. He demands I do what He says, or else! I can’t love Him, and because I can’t He’s going to burn me in the lake of fire. Don’t talk to me about hope. It’s hopeless.”

And in tears she stood up, shook her head, smoothed her skirt and left.

Hopeless? This is the Christian parallel to the world’s “Who wants to live forever.” For who wants to spend eternity with a Divine Ogre, who wants to walk the golden streets forever fearfully looking over the shoulder in case God comes by?

How clearly this demonstrates that it is the *character of God* that determines what you hope for. If the ‘God of Hope’ is One who is harsh and vindictive, then what is there to hope for except that extinction will come quickly? On the other hand, if the ‘God of Hope’ is some vague fantasy figure of the Santa Claus variety, then what kind of hope will there be? Nothing substantial, that’s for sure.

No: for there to be real hope it has to be sure and certain--and attractive! So how was I to share this hope? Only by sharing my own experience of the God of Hope, and the person I know Him to be.

Still crying, she came back into the church and sat down again. And listened. I quietly spoke of *my* God of Hope. And from her despair, hope grew again: hope in the true God of Hope who saves us by hope in the blessed hope!

A half-smile dawned through the still-questioning wet eyes; a new start with the God who offers His hope.

While pilgrims here we journey on  
In this dark vale of sin and gloom  
Through tribulation, hate, and scorn,  
Or through the portals of the tomb,  
Till our returning King shall come  
To take His exile captives home,  
O! What can buoy the spirits up?  
‘Tis this alone--the blessed hope.  
--*Annie R Smith.*

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