

Living
the
Hope

WITHOUT
HOPE
WE ARE
ONLY
HALF ALIVE.

JONATHAN GALLAGHER

Living
the
Hope

Other books by Jonathan Gallagher:

Fear Not? Why Not?

Is God to Blame?

Really Useful Bible Quiz Book

The Ultimate God

Young Man

Young Woman

To order, call 1-800-765-6955.

Visit us at www.reviewandherald.com for information on other Review and Herald® products.

Living the Hope

JONATHAN GALLAGHER



REVIEW AND HERALD® PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
HAGERSTOWN, MD 21740

Copyright © 2002 by
Review and Herald® Publishing Association
All rights reserved

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Texts credited to NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Bible texts credited to TEV are from the *Good News Bible*—Old Testament: Copyright © American Bible Society 1976, 1992; New Testament: Copyright © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992.

This book was
Edited by Gerald Wheeler
Copyedited by Delma Miller and James Cavil
Designed by Mark O'Connor
Cover photograph by Tony Stone/Jay S. Simon
Electronic makeup by Shirley M. Bolivar
Typeset: 11/14 Minion

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

06 05 04 03 02 5 4 3 2 1

R&H Cataloging Service
Gallagher, Jonathan, 1952-
Living the hope.

1. Second Coming. 2. Hope. I. Title.

232.9

ISBN 0-8280-1671-2

Dedication

To Vida, a truly wonderful colleague
who contributes greatly to the cause of God,
and to her husband, Chris—
my appreciation for living the hope
in such a dynamic and practical way!

Contents

1	Why We Hope	9
2	Hope Alive!	18
3	Jesus the Hope	27
4	Hope Makes the Difference	36
5	Hope: Motivation for Mission	44
6	Hope: Too Much, or Not Enough?	52
7	Practical Hope	61
8	Hope on the Inside	69
9	Hope and the Position of Suspense	78
10	Too Busy Occupying? On Making Hope Relevant	87
11	Dealing With the Delay of Hope	96
12	Called to One Hope	105
13	Hope Blazes Bright!	114

Why We Hope

IS THERE ANY HOPE?

The afternoon of December 17, 1927, was as gray as any winter's dawn. The waters of the Atlantic off Provincetown, Massachusetts, were rough and cold as United States submarine S-4 completed its test run under water and began to surface. Raking upward through the chill waves, the captain checked the periscope. Nothing on the surface.

Moments later the coast guard cutter *Paulding* rammed into the side of the S-4 as it surfaced immediately in front of the cutter. The force of the impact from the *Paulding*, cruising at 18 knots, tore two gaping holes in the hull of the S-4, and the sub dropped like a stone to the seabed.

The *Paulding* sent out a distress signal and waited for survivors. None surfaced. The S-4 lay in 100 feet of water, just 1,800 yards from shore.

Rescuers were slow to arrive at the scene and to locate the sunken sub. The first diver made it down some 22 hours after the accident. Working his way along the wreck, his lead-weighted boots banged on the metal hull. He heard a faint tapping from the torpedo room. Could it be that some of the crew had survived the disaster?

He banged on the hatch cover and received an answering tap. Using Morse code, he learned that six men had survived

and were trapped in an air pocket.

“Is there any hope?” came the question. “Please hurry!”

Imprisoned in a steel shell at the bottom of the ocean, the men of the S-4 had only a short time until their air ran out. They were in total darkness without food or water. Their only thought: *Is there any hope?*

That’s the question! Is there any hope? Faced with the inevitability of death, all look for some kind of hope—a way out, a means of escape. Yet like the six on the S-4, we have no way to save ourselves. Groping around in the dark, hungry, thirsty, cold, wet, and tired, the only thing that keeps us alive is hope itself.

With a storm brewing, the rescuers tried to refloat the submarine. But it was too badly damaged, and the air line was ineffective. They attached an oscillator to the hull so that the crewmen inside could communicate to the ship above by Morse code. Messages of comfort came from the men’s relatives. Then a diver descended in atrocious weather to try to bring the suffocating men some air. He became trapped in the wreckage and had to be rescued himself. The divers had to postpone any further attempt.

The messages became infrequent as the air ran out. After 62 hours in their living coffin, the men sent their final message: “We understand.” Their hope had turned to hopelessness as the rescue failed.

Three months later the Navy salvaged the S-4 and repaired it. It became the test submarine for experimental equipment like the Momsen Lung, designed to help submariners survive such an accident and escape to the surface. The vessel was a memorial to a hope that had died.

The tragedy of the sinking of the S-4 and its failed rescue illustrates in a graphic way the condition in which we find ourselves. It’s a situation with no escape. We have no source of salvation in ourselves. In the darkness, as we feel cold, wet,

hungry, and thirsty, we realize that our rescue can come only from outside.

The question is always: “Is there any hope?”

The failure to help the men of the S-4 also shows what can happen when we place our hope in human strength and ability. However well intentioned, however eager to assist, human hope is feeble and fallible.

For our situation, when we too ask, “Is there any hope?” the only response that has any real meaning is to place our hope in the God of hope.

That is why Christian hope defines who we are. Without it we are as doomed as the crew of the S-4. Yet with this wonderful hope we have the assurance of life with meaning now—and an eternity beyond. That is why Scripture can describe our anticipated future as “sure and certain,” and why it is truly the “blessed hope.” For it relies on the assurances of God Himself, the only one trustworthy and true.

WHY HOPE?

We all need hope to function, to live. Without hope, life becomes meaningless and pointless. We have nothing good to expect in the future, so we ignore the future. If we have no hope in our hearts, then life is simply one long grinding despair, the “monotonous moils of strained, hard-pressed humanity” (Thomas Hardy).

When hope ceases, life becomes nothing more than mere existence. For “if the mere delay of hope deferred makes the heart sick, what will the death of hope—its final and total disappointment—despair, do to it?” (W. Nevins).

Truly, “in all things it is better to hope than to despair” (Goethe).

That is why to hope is so vital, and to really live we need a dynamic hope. The future must always be part of our perspec-

tive, leading us on from where we are to where we wish to be:

“Hope, like the gleaming taper’s light,
Adorns and cheers our way;
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray” (Oliver Goldsmith).

We are creatures of hope. The need for hope is an essential part of who we are. As we look forward, we expect, we anticipate. The future we hope for determines the way we think and act in the present. When hope dies, we—for all meaningful purposes—also die. Without hope we are imprisoned in an existence of despair, a life that has no purpose and no goal. Hope is what makes us free—free to anticipate a future that is not just a continuation of the dreary present.

The capacity to see that life has meaning and purpose, that we can choose to make a difference, that we are *free to hope*—such vision makes us free. As Christians, that means the liberating power of God, so that whatever our circumstances, we know that both our present and our future are secure in Him.

Christian hope is the excitement of knowing God’s intentions, of trusting His promises. That’s expectation of the keenest kind. That’s anticipation. And that’s the freedom that the blessed hope brings—looking for a present and a future guaranteed by God Himself.

Why hope? The answer is that to abandon hope is not an option, not a possibility. Hope defines us, declares who we are. The Christian hope is the hope above all hopes, and without it we are immeasurably poorer. It is the future of God, and our participation in such a future.

HOPE IS THE WINDOW

“Eternity is the divine treasure house, and hope is the window, by means of which mortals are permitted to see, as

through a glass darkly, the things which God is preparing” (William Mountford).

Hope is our window on life. The way in which we see what is around us, it defines the present and what we long for. Many people down through the ages have tried to describe the meaning of hope and its basis. Some of their attempts have been wise, some amusing, some plainly foolish. But such thoughts give us some idea of the contrast between humanity’s hope and that of God:

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope” (Martin Luther King, Jr.).

“We judge of man’s wisdom by his hope” (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

“Great hopes make great men” (Thomas Fuller).

“He that lives upon hope will die fasting” (Benjamin Franklin).

“Hope is a waking dream” (Aristotle).

“The miserable have no other medicine but only hope” (William Shakespeare).

“Lord, save us all from . . . a hope tree that has lost the faculty of putting out blossoms” (Mark Twain).

“Hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark” (George Iles).

“If one truly has lost hope, one would not be on hand to say so” (Eric Bentley).

“Take hope from the heart of man, and you make him a beast of prey” (Ouida).

“Hope never abandons you, you abandon it” (George Weinberg).

“Hope is patience with the lamp lit” (Tertullian).

“Hope is the poor man’s bread” (Gary Herbert).

“Hope is the word which God has written on the brow of every man” (Victor Hugo).

“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope” (Martin Luther).

“True hope responds to the real world, to real life; it is an active effort” (Walter Anderson).

“Hope is itself a species of happiness, and, perhaps, the chief happiness which this world affords” (Samuel Johnson).

“Hope is the pillar that holds up the world” (Pliny).

Yet what do *we* see as we look out through hope’s window? Is it just a dream or a vain expectation? Is hope “the universal liar” (R. G. Ingersoll)? What is hope?

ANY HOPE? THE ANSWER OF THE ONLY HOPE

The basis for the Christian hope is not vague or insubstantial. Jesus, the Son of God, is the promise-maker and the promise-keeper:

“‘Do not be worried and upset,’ Jesus told them. ‘Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am’” (John 14:1-3, TEV).

Such exciting words to thrill the heart! And “he is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23). Here we have the true foundation of hope, the assurance of the God who not only knows the future but invites us to be there with Him. That is why “we have placed our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all” (1 Tim. 4:10, TEV).

Sometimes the days seem dark and dreary, and it is easy to fall into depression and despair and demand “Is there any hope?” That’s when God comes close once again as we search for meaning and purpose, and reminds us of the implications of our hope. Hope is everything to us—the source of our being, our destiny, our very lives. To live without hope is not to live at all. In fact, it denies our very system of belief, for “where there is no hope, there is no faith” (William Gouge).

It is God who intervenes to bring hope. For us even to exist, we must believe in a future, whatever we may think that future may bring. It *has* to be there, as a part of our inner life. And it is the God of hope who brings hope. “We have placed our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all” (1 Tim. 4:10, TEV).

Our hope is based on God—and on Him alone. It has no confidence in anything or anyone else. And it is a divine hope, based on the assurance of God Himself. In the words of Adoniram Judson: “My future is as bright as the promises of God.”

This is the only hope that is truly meaningful. We may hope in many things, extend our hopes in many directions, and have many vain hopes. But the only true hope is God Himself, for there is no future without Him. That is why we need to continue to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). That’s where we need to focus the eyes of hope, for “we have placed our hope in him” (2 Cor. 1:10, TEV). Ultimately, “we will always be with the Lord. So then, encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:17, 18, TEV).

What do we hope for? To be with Jesus. To be home with God. To begin an eternal life in the presence of our loving Lord.

Is that really what we are hoping for? The true goal of hope is not in feelings or even in the Second Advent as an event itself. The meaning of the Second Advent is that God comes for His friends to take them to be with Him for all eternity. Now, if we are not really looking forward to such a time, then our reaction to the Advent hope may be less than positive. Much depends on our understanding of who God is—do we want to spend all eternity in the presence of one we do not love, trust, and admire? What is our own personal hope, really and truly? Whom are we hoping for?

SAVED BY HOPE

“For it is by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we

hope for, then it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:24, 25, TEV).

Saved by hope! Instead of pointing to a legal definition of salvation, Paul in Romans affirms that God’s salvation rests in the hope that He provides. Instead of the many other hopes of our world, here we catch a glimpse of the vastness of hope when God is its underwriter. Our reaction can only be, “What, then, can I hope for, Lord? I put my hope in you” (Ps. 39:7, TEV).

At those times when hope seems dim, we need to remember this fact. Our salvation is intimately bound up with this divinely given hope, as sure as the promises of God Himself:

“Let us hold on firmly to the hope we profess, because we can trust God to keep his promise” (Heb. 10:23, TEV).

We can sum up our response in the words of Psalm 130:1-7:

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption” (NIV).

THE GOD OF HOPE LEADS US INTO HIS FUTURE

One of my earliest memories is of a picture that hung in my parents’ bedroom. It was a simple countryside scene of a bright woodland clearing covered with bluebells. I remember gazing into that picture for hours when I was really sick with chicken-pox. I loved the bending of the tree boughs, the patterned bright green of the new leaves, the shafts of sunlight slanting bright against the dark trunks. In the foreground the bluebells

shone with an intense reflected brilliance, flowers like a living carpet spread across the glade.

But what intrigued me most, though, was the path that led my eyes into the distance.

There, in the center of the scene, the path disappeared into a fascinating haze, a misty blur of possibilities. For me, that beautifully captured blend of mist and light became the substance of the future hope. A hazy shimmering on the borders of reality, a symbol of the arrival of time into the present. I can still feel that chilling, thrilling, exciting sense of wonderment.

I strained to make out something in that misty light. But the future symbolized there remained distant and insubstantial. I wanted to throw myself into the picture and run up that path to find what that haziness hid.

The vision remains—the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The future of God’s hope makes a reality of this present. God’s promised future is more real, more meaningful, than “this insubstantial pageant.”

The future leads us on in hope. To God.

CHAPTER 2

Hope Alive!

RESURRECTION HOPE

Anne was a sad girl that time I visited. Her sunken eyes were ringed with dark circles and smoldered with a dying fire. Her mouth turned down, her hollow cheeks were pale, her hair rough and ragged.

Anne was anorexic. A friend concerned for her—for the girl's survival—had introduced me to her in her hospital room in southern England. She weighed maybe 70 pounds, and yet every time she looked at herself in the mirror she saw herself as grossly obese.

Her thin arms rested limp on the bedspread as she wearily turned to me.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I called to see how you were. Someone told me about you. Do you want to talk?" I explained that I was a pastor and that a mutual friend had suggested I visit.

"If you like."

"Tell me about yourself."

"Nothing much to say. I don't eat. I suppose I'm going to die. I don't care." The hopelessness of her situation hung heavy in the air. "Now I'm losing my teeth. They say I don't get enough nutrition. But I eat so much. I just wish I wasn't so fat."

I wanted to respond sharply and tell her she was lying to

Hope Alive!

herself. But the doctors had explained enough to make me keep quiet. Since she lived in denial, she wasn't about to believe what some stranger told her.

I asked her what she believed in.

"I don't know. Nothing, really. Once you're dead, you're dead. Least that's what it seems. Who knows? At any rate I should find out soon enough. If it's different I'll come back and let you know." She laughed—a hollow, mirthless laugh.

I began explaining what I believed. I spoke of the hope of eternal life—that death is not the end, that God has promised an incredible future for those who choose Him, that at His coming He will change us, and all our pain and problems will be healed—forever.

Anne was silent for a long time. Then she shook her head, and a tear trickled down her face.

"No, it can't be true. It can't be as good as that. It's a vain hope."

I said nothing.

"And how do you know it's true? No one knows! Just a fable, a fairy tale." Her eyes burned with anger. "Don't you give me all this religious claptrap. Bunch of nonsense. Get out of here!"

With a nod I left.

The next week she turned her face away as I came into the room.

"Hello, Anne. How is it today?"

She said nothing at first, then in a low voice muttered, "They're sticking more tubes into me." An IV unit stood beside the bed. "They say it's the only way to get nutrition into me. They just want to make me fat."

"Anne, they just want to help you go on living."

"Why? What's the point? I have nothing to hope for. Why go on living?"

Some of the saddest words I've ever heard echoed around that cold and clinical hospital room.

Picking up my Bible, I just started reading. Psalm 23. John 3. John 14. First Thessalonians 4. Revelation 22.

Messages of assurance, promises of hope, reasons for living.

I read for what seemed a long time. She said nothing. The anger had gone. At the end she sighed.

"You didn't make that up, did you? What you were reading, it's true, isn't it?"

I smiled and nodded. "It's the Bible."

"I'd like to read it myself. Could I?"

Giving her the Bible, I suggested some places to read. She held it against her chest.

"I'll see you next week," I said as I left.

The next week Anne had many questions. The first surprised me.

"So who wrote this Bible? I mean, it says it was printed in 1988. So it's quite recent."

Of all the people I've ever met, Anne knew the least about the Bible. She even thought that someone had just written it. It took a lot of explaining to help her understand what it was and what it taught. But after many weeks she began to take hold of the truth.

But not without setbacks. One day I arrived to find that she had tried to run away and had made it onto a bus before collapsing. But slowly progress came.

And as hope returned, so did her appetite and her self-image. She began to recognize exactly what she had been doing to herself.

What made the difference? Not me, that's for sure. It was God Himself who intervened—the God of hope. For that is what she needed most of all—a sense of meaning and purpose in a future together with the loving Lord. Slowly she recovered

her health as she regained her hope and assurance—that God was her best friend and would walk with her on her way.

Eventually she was strong enough to leave the hospital. She went home, taking the Bible I had given her. Before I moved away to a new pastoral district she was doing fine, strong in her hope. At our last meeting she told me how she felt about what had happened.

"It was like experiencing the resurrection," she smiled shyly. "It was as if I were already dead. Then God came in and called me back to life, just as He did with Lazarus. I know that soon I would have been gone—the doctors told me so. But God wasn't going to let me go, was He?"

I shook my head. "He wanted you to live again, to find your eternal hope in Him, not just now, but for all eternity."

"Yes," she said, looking straight into my eyes, "and it's hope that we all need most. Hope that we have a future, hope that God will remake and heal us, hope that He will bring us back to life. That's why hope is really blessed. Because I am saved by hope—God's hope."

HOPE ALIVE—INDIVIDUALLY

That's how hope comes alive in our individual lives. As we understand the incredible graciousness of God in confirming hope beyond our pointless existence without Him, then the confidence of a future with Him becomes a reality in our experience. Each of us comes to the point at which we can say with Micah: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior" (Micah 7:7, NIV).

Our world today often misuses and misunderstands the idea of hope. As a word, it is so overused and undervalued that we give it too many worthless meanings.

"I hope so" all too often means "I don't really expect it." It's a faint, vague wish that we "hope" something will happen, but

do not really anticipate it. It just would be nice, but who could really believe in such a hope.

The truth is that God's hope is not some insubstantial carrot to lure us on into an insecure future. It is the solid answer to our hopelessness, that hopelessness that hangs over us like a gray mist and chills any confident anticipation of a wonderful future. Hope is what gives meaning to the present and makes the troubles and trials worthwhile as we look for the fulfillment of promise.

Too many people hope in things that cannot provide assurance. They hope in money, or in possessions of any kind; hope in a cure; hope in fallible human beings—none of these are worth trusting with your treasure of hope. "Hope without an object cannot live" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge), and the object of our hope must be in the nature and character of God Himself.

For hope is essential—and without it we cannot survive. Hope is close to the fundamental essence of living—to motivation, to meaning, to purpose. It is a vital part of our creativity that says that life is more than just what we see now.

Thus hope is the antidote to the fearfulness permeating our world and assaulting each of us. Our consumer society gives us what we think we want, then we find material things don't really help us at all. As a result, we become frustrated and dissatisfied. All our grasping after this world's elusive answers only leads us to despair. But God's hope, in contrast to our supposed "answers," gives direction to our lives and fills them with meaning and purpose.

THE LIFE OF HOPE

As not just an aspect of belief, but as life's destination and goal, Christian hope points us to God in the present and assures us of Him at the end of our journey. That's why living the hope does make such a difference, especially as we face the hard ques-

tions that confront us in this existence. It's when crises come that hope really can make the absolute difference.

When others around us notice a different attitude in us, a refusal to fall into the way the world thinks, then we are truly representing our Lord. Jesus called for His followers to be distinctive. In expressing hope at all times, whether in tragedy or in success, we truly show that we are Christians eagerly anticipating the return of our Lord:

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. . . . God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:11-19, NIV).

"Hope is brightest when it dawns from fears," Sir Walter Scott observed, and truly when the night is at its darkest, hope shines the most brightly. It is in the hardest times that God's promises are the most precious and the most meaningful. While crises and tragedies may tempt us to give up on God, it is at these times we need Him most.

God's message of hope is today more necessary than ever. The stress of modern life, the increasing problems and challenges, the rising tide of evil—all indicate the vital importance of holding on to the God of hope. To live the hope means not only that we believe in the soon return of Jesus, but that the belief makes itself real in our daily lives.

MAKING HOPE REAL

Sarajevo, May 27, 1992, 4:00 p.m. A mortar shell lands on a line of people waiting to buy bread in the market. Twenty-two men, women, and children die. As he sees this act of violent destruction, Vedran Smailovic, the principal cellist of the Sarajevo Opera Orchestra, decides to fight back. Not with bombs or bul-

lets or mortar shells, but with his cello.

Every evening in full evening dress he goes to the cratered market square and plays. Performing a rebuke to those who kill indiscriminately, he presents music of hope in a time of abandonment. He plays for a future amid the chaos and rubble of the present.

What Smailovic does symbolizes the practical kind of hope that we all need to share. Hope has to become real and individual for all of us. It needs to be part of who we are, the motivator and inspirer of our lives.

We may say that we hope, that we believe in Jesus' return as one of the fundamental beliefs. But do we passionately look forward to that day, eagerly wanting it to come? Can we say that we are longing for Jesus to come back for us? That we look up to heaven with anticipation, waiting for the day when we can say, "Lo, this is our God; . . . he will save us"?

We have to live the hope.

Pastor H is more than 70 and from a country in eastern Asia, where he dedicated his whole life to helping those around him, regardless of religion or ethnicity. He has seen many changes in his homeland—ranging from foreign overlords to atheistic ideologists to military tyrants to ruthless secularist exploiters.

Yet he survived. In a small village with a Christian community in the remote countryside, Pastor H continued to share his faith and to help with the practical needs of others—food, clothing, and shelter. He married and had children. Down by the river he laboriously built a wooden house as the family home beside the church.

In the twilight of his years he continued his ministry, working for the good of others. Then came more troubles, as if he had not seen enough of violence and death. Yet this came not from the rulers, as in the past, but from the community. Though of different faiths, the villagers had lived together in

harmony whatever the situation. But now it was different.

"I do not understand it," he says. "I do not want to understand it. For so many years we lived together, side by side. But then came religious leaders who told those of their faith in the village that we were the enemy. Armed men came to the village and forced us out of the village. They set fire to the church; then they went to our homes and burned them, too. I saw the home I had built destroyed before my eyes. It was very hard."

After a while Pastor H and his family returned to his home. The local religious leaders said they wanted peace. "They promised us it would be like before," says Pastor H. "That is what we wanted. To live in peace. So we came back. And I used all my savings to buy timber to make another church and another house."

After rebuilding the church, Pastor H slowly constructed a new house for himself and his family. But just months later the village leader announced that no Christians would be allowed to remain. "This has to be a pure village," he told them. "All Christians must leave."

And so the pastor and his family picked up what belongings they could and left to become part of another tragic refugee crowd, slowly trailing out of the country.

They now live in exile, strangers in a land far from home. At the end of his life, Pastor H is sad his village forced him out. "It is incredible what has happened," he says. "To be evicted from your home by those of another religion who claim to be lovers of peace is bitterly disappointing. After all we endured together, to be thrown out now, and all because of religion—that is hard to bear. I often think of those we left behind and wonder what has happened to them, and who remains to tell God's good news."

A tragic story of rejection and loss. But what of his own convictions?

“Oh, my trust in God is as strong as ever. Despite all that has happened, and that we had to flee all that we called our home, we continue to hope in the power of God. We know that God holds this world like a pebble in His hand, and that our future is secure with Him. One day—and soon—we will see Him coming back for His own people, and we shall be together with Him forever. I long for that day even more, and that is why it is rightly called the blessed hope.”

“I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: ‘Now God’s home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared’ (Rev. 21:3, 4, TEV).

The Jesus Hope

THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF HOPE

Just a month before he died, noted atheist and humanist writer Jean-Paul Sartre spoke of what he was anticipating. “The world seems ugly, bad and without hope. There, that’s the cry of despair of an old man who’ll die in despair. But that’s exactly what I resist, and I know I shall die in hope. But that hope needs a foundation” (cited in Stephen H. Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982], p. 227).

Sartre’s tragedy, as he himself recognized, was that he did not have a firm foundation for any kind of hope, least of all to be able to die in hope. We can find such a hope only in God, whom Sartre had rejected. When God is not part of our hope, then any kind of hope is futile. For we are mortal, and all our hopes and dreams turn to dust unless we place them in the hands of our loving Lord.

The truth is that we define our hope as Jesus. It is based on the promise of Jesus Himself, and it centers in the sure and certain expectation of His return. Our hope is guaranteed by the words of Jesus, and confirmed by His resurrection from the dead. The only foundation for a realistic hope is in Jesus, the one whom John in his Gospel terms the eternal Word. The Word, who is God, became flesh and dwelt among us, living

and dying so we could live forever with Him. It is *this same Jesus* who will return—the Jesus we know in our daily experience here and now: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11, NIV).

In proclaiming the Advent hope we must always remember that it centers on Jesus. We are not preaching a message of gloom and doom, or a Hollywood-like disaster scenario, but the great news of Jesus’ return. Our message is clear: it is the *Jesus hope!*

We need to focus on His personal promise, on how it brings us assurance in life. Our hope is credible, sure, and certain—it is not a misguided hope. We can hope with confidence because we hope in *the Jesus we know*.

The blessed hope is of the return of our loving Lord to keep His promise to take us to be with Him forever. The hope is based on the promises of Jesus,
made possible by the victory of Jesus,
accomplished by the will of Jesus,
achieved by the power of Jesus,
completed in being with Jesus.

For it is God Himself who draws us into His future. The hope He shares with us means that we do not need to consider the present as wasted effort and time when we cannot accomplish all that we wish. God tells us we have a future assured with Him, so that even if we see no results in what we do, our work is not in vain. Because God is the source of the hope, we look forward to Him. “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9).

THE JESUS HOPE: HOW IT WILL BE

Many Christians have unusual ideas about the fulfillment of

the Jesus hope. Some talk about rapture and secret comings and spiritual advents. But Jesus could not have made it clearer: “For the Son of Man will come like the lightning which flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west” (Matt. 24:27, TEV).

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky; and all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (verse 30, TEV).

“Look, he is coming on the clouds! Everyone will see him” (Rev. 1:7, TEV).

“There will be the shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven” (1 Thess. 4:16, TEV).

The coming is like lightning. Everyone will see it, and everyone will see Him. The Lord arrives with a shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet. It will be dramatically visible and audible! No one will miss this event. Christ will not return in some secret rapture or invisible or spiritualized advent recognized by only a few.

When Jesus gave His promise, He was absolutely sure that His advent would be a literal return. As He left, so will He come again—but with infinitely greater majesty and glory. Anyone who says His coming will be invisible or secret or hidden completely contradicts the clear descriptions of Jesus and the Bible.

ANCHORED!

“So we who have found safety with him are greatly encouraged to hold firmly to the hope placed before us. We have this hope as an anchor for our lives. It is safe and sure” (Heb. 6:18, 19, TEV).

Just as a ship is safe and secure when firmly anchored, so will we be when we trust in the Jesus hope. Even though winds of false doctrine may blow or storms of persecution may rage

against us, we can rest secure in this anchoring hope. Placing our confidence in Jesus, we can “hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6; see also Heb. 6:11).

Human beings need conviction. Conviction that existence has meaning, that life has importance, and that there exists a future. The hope that God gives us assures us of all that—and more! As sure as God Himself, the Jesus hope is even more solid than the ground underneath our feet.

Many religions and philosophies attempt to answer humanity’s questions about existence and to provide some kind of hope. Without being arrogant, the Christian hope presented in the Bible outclasses them all. We have a “better hope,” according to Hebrews 7:19.

Why? Because it assures us of a future together with Him. Able to give motivation and purpose to the present, such a conviction is far more meaningful than the materialistic hopes of the present age. And Jesus guaranteed it through His own resurrection.

“The human being is only to be defined in terms of his whither, not of his whence,” wrote theologian Helmut Thielicke. In other words, it’s where we’re going that is important, not where we came from. What God sees as potential in us is what He wants to make reality in His kingdom of the future—which is why He waits for us to respond to His glorious offer of salvation.

As a consequence, “hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

ONLY JESUS

The simple motto of those who look to God’s future is “Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1, TEV). Should the temptation come to become anxious and to despair, then this simple

phrase sums up the Christian response. Christ is our hope—hope that gives assurance in our present and enables us to look forward to a fuller experience in the God-made future.

The prayer for all of us is this: “May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13, TEV).

Sometimes we worry over what happens to us in the present. We look around, and like David, ask, “Why do the wicked prosper?” It all seems so unfair at times, and we become disturbed about God and His involvement in our lives. Surely it should somehow be different.

But God reminds us that we are part of the ongoing great controversy over His nature and character. The present is the “time between,” the era of demonstration that will fully vindicate truth and right and prove the charges of the devil false. So because of this, Scripture urges us, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope” (Prov. 24:19, 20, NIV).

No future hope—that is why so many focus on the immediate present, on instant pleasure and satisfaction. Because they have no future to anticipate, no Jesus in whom to place their hope.

For in reality, we really do have no hope apart from God. We may try to fool ourselves, but any other hope will in the end prove to be nothing more than an illusion. Some, for example, hope that science will find a cure for all diseases, even to the point of having their bodies cryogenically frozen in the faint chance that one day medical science will be able to bring them back to life when it has conquered their particular disease. But such hopes will be in vain, and such people are “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12, NIV). While many may not admit it, they have no real hope, and as a result look

just to the things of this world to satisfy them—money, power, drugs . . . the list is endless.

But when the end comes, they will have nothing. They will grieve as “the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13, NIV). In an agony of despair, the hopeless try to blot out their pain by any means they can. They have sadly discovered that all other hopes are futile and worthless.

A PARABLE OF MISGUIDED HOPES AND CREATIVE LOSS

It was unusual to have months of snow and ice covering the ground around my childhood home in southern England. But not wishing to let such an opportunity slip by, that winter I began my greatest construction program ever.

A 9-year-old does not worry about such problems as below-freezing temperatures, exposure, and frostbite. Nor is time a factor when it comes to realizing dreams, of bringing one’s hopes into hard reality.

Very hard reality, in fact. Ice hard as iron, water turned to stone.

The ground at the back of our house sloped up the hill. Right beside the house, on the northern side, was a steeper bank, separated from the house wall by a narrow ditch. It was there that the dream became reality. Hour after freezing hour I would stand in that ditch, crafting an ice village on the side of that bank. I had great hopes for my creation!

After the first week my mother gave up calling me to come in from the bitter cold. A man with a mission does not care about such trifles as hot chocolate and toasted muffins. Slowly my miniature village rose from in its frosty construction site.

First a one-lane road wound its way along the bank, circuitously avoiding humps of snow and the crevasses of the glacier down by the drain. That was hard enough, pounding

away at ice as hard as rock to make something like a flat surface that toy cars could drive along. After many hours of backbreaking work, I discovered that warm water could do the job much more easily and produce some interesting shapes as I smoothed the road while it refroze. Developing my technology, I made rapid progress using mother’s hair dryer attached to an extension cord until she objected (rather unreasonably, I thought) to its somewhat unorthodox use.

Once the roadway was in (complete with a terrifying section more like a bobsled run), I turned to architecture. Building with snow is not an easy task. For example, just try making square bricks while wearing mittens. Then there’s the question of crumbling. Snow bricks have the annoying tendency to fall apart right at the critical stage of construction.

The first few houses were hardly recognizable, resembling mounds of small snowballs. But as I developed my technique, something more recognizable as human habitations took shape. Then office blocks. The skyscraper attempt ended in ignominious failure and required some heavy repair work to the residential area it had crashed down on. (I began to see the impact of human mistakes. A lot of ice people would have died in that terrible tragedy.)

I even attempted a church, and with the newly discovered process of spraying the construction with water from Mom’s flower mister, it even held together, though the spire was decidedly skewed.

Eventually, after what must have been hundreds of hours of work in the fearsome cold, the village covered the whole length of the bank, with post office, bank, general store, gas station, and all the rest. (The skating rink idea admittedly did not work too well. Pouring gallons of hot water onto the snow only melted a large hole, and the end result looked more like a volcano.)

I would like to have said that people came from all around to

admire my creation, but at least I convinced Mom and Dad and brother and sister to come outside and make the appropriate expressions of wonder. (They also wondered about the volcano.)

Next I began to lay plans to extend my village up the slope above the bank. Soon I would create a huge metropolis—a whole ice planet, maybe! Great hopes!

But that very morning my great schemes turned to dust. Or more correctly, slush. The temperature rose, and I watched in anguished horror as all my labor melted away before my eyes. The office block slid down the bank and wiped out the fire station. The church collapsed (with what effect on its ice-worshippers, who can tell?). The ice rink/volcano became a lake. And before long, everything slid down into the ditch and melted down the drain. All gone, swept away.

Hardly able to speak, I dragged my mother outside and just pointed. Where there had once stood a proud ice village was just the old familiar grass bank.

If I'd known the words, I would have quoted Solomon about everything being vanity and there being no profit for any work under the sun (which by now had come out and was melting all the snow away). All gone. And not even a picture for the record. Only what remained in our memories.

It was a hard lesson on the lack of permanence in this life, on building without a sure foundation. All that work—for what? At this time of loss I saw with crystal vision that everything here is temporary. Just as with my ice village, all melts, fades, dies. We search for permanency in a world that does not know the concept. Our dreams and hopes seem so insubstantial.

But one day our God, in whom we place our hope and trust, will open up far more than an ice bank to our creativity. We will have worlds upon worlds, and ideas beyond imagination. On that day we will have vastly more than short-lived ice villages that melt in the morning sun.

One bright morning God will be here, and His people will be with Him in His eternal city. I just want to be there, experiencing God's total creative permanence. What about you?

Hope Makes a Difference

WHEN HOPE DROWNS

According to a poll in the *Houston Post* of January 15, 1995, one out of every five people in America feels life is meaningless.

As Charles Sawyer noted: "Of all the forces that make for a better world, none is so indispensable, none so powerful, as hope. Without hope men are only half alive."

Half alive—or not even alive at all. For without hope in the future, the present has no meaning.

On March 24, 1950, the town of Flagstaff, Maine, drowned. A vast hydroelectric project dammed the waters of the aptly named Dead River, and it rose to engulf the town. But the town was already dead. During the months before the inevitable end, the townspeople gave up on their community, since it had no future.

No hope.

If it is true that where there's life, there's hope, then the opposite is also true. Where there's no hope, there's no life.

The buildings became run-down. No one bothered to repaint their homes. The streets went unrepaired. What was the point in doing anything? Soon the town would cease to exist, its name erased from maps. In its place a vast lake spread across the valley.

The town decayed long before the water rose, because hope had died. As someone said at the time, recognizing the impend-

Hope Makes a Difference

ing abandonment of the town and its lack of a future, "where there's no hope for the future, there is no power in the present."

No future hope, no present power. We all see that. In our own life experience, when the future hope dies, present power vanishes, for it is the future that gives power to the present. Hope really does make the difference!

THE HOPING KIND OF PEOPLE

So if that is true, what is the result in those who hope? Peter asks that very question—as we come to know this Christian hope, what kind of people are we to be? His answer: "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:11, 12, NIV).

Though we should take it seriously, this is not a message of doom and disaster to the hoping Christian. Nor is it a process of beating ourselves into submission and making ourselves right, but rather of accepting the results of hope—the transforming power of God's grace in the present. Remember that we are to rejoice in this hope. Holiness and godliness are not incompatible with joy and happiness—they are aspects of the whole. What God looks for is a people who will live rightly for Him, representing the truth that He came at such tremendous cost to share eternal life with us. As we live in hope we consequently become clearly identifiable Christians.

For, as Paul reminds us, "we have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV). Each of us becomes a display, an exhibition of hope. It is not an act but a living of the life of hope so that others can look and understand and want that same motivational hope in their own lives.

Since we are to be a spectacle to a watching world, we need to ask ourselves, "What do they see in relation to our hope? Do they see us as Christ's friends and followers, ever hoping, ever

looking for the completion of salvation, and living honest, truthful, and joyful lives?"

God is waiting for a people who truly follow Him, who believe His truth as opposed to the devil's lies; who, despite all kinds of attacks, remain true to their Lord. This end-time generation refuses to let any assault on their faith shake them, and they truly live their lives in harmony with God. Nor should they be surprised or taken unawares by the fulfillment of their hope.

"But you, friends, are not in the darkness, and the Day should not take you by surprise like a thief. All of you are people who belong to the light, who belong to the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, we should not be sleeping like the others; we should be awake and sober" (1 Thess. 5:4-6, TEV).

SPEEDING THE HOPE— WITHOUT BECOMING EXTREME

Peter talks about our speeding the hope, or hastening the day (see 2 Peter 3:12). How is this possible? Doesn't God already know the time of His coming? So how can we "hasten" it?

Yes, God does know the time. And yes, He will come when He chooses. But He comes for those who wait. This gives us a clue to understanding our part in the return of the Lord. We can "hasten" it by being part of the process.

God comes "in the fullness of time." That "fullness" refers to conditions on earth. Our part consists of outreach and witness, of living our lives for God. Then when the fullness of time matures, Jesus will return. Until that time, though, we are to share our hope, rightly represent God, preach the gospel, stand for the right, live the truth in our lives, and speed the hope.

Those who claim to live the hope must wake up and realize the implications of this life-changing, world-altering hope:

"The time has come for you to wake up from your sleep. For

the moment when we will be saved is closer now than it was when we first believed. The night is nearly over, day is almost here. Let us stop doing the things that belong to the dark, and let us take up weapons for fighting in the light" (Rom. 13:11, 12, TEV).

Wake up! Our role is to be alert, ready to share the good news of hope as we await its fulfillment! Not in a condition of overexcitement, but in the assurance of our trust in the One who has promised to return. Jesus Himself reminded His followers that the timing rests in the hands of the Lord, and that we should not overstress the imminence.

"While the people were listening to this, Jesus continued and told them a parable. He was now almost at Jerusalem, and they supposed that the Kingdom of God was just about to appear. So he said, 'There was once a man of high rank who was going to a country far away to be made king'" (Luke 19:11, 12, TEV).

The problem Jesus addressed here is an overemphasis on the *soonest* of the coming. So Jesus related the parable about the nobleman journeying to a far country. The implication here is that the nobleman's journey will take some time. People should not expect him to return immediately.

Although Jesus earnestly desired to return instantly—and why He says in Revelation that He is coming quickly—Scripture recognizes the need for time for people to respond. God is patient, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

His people can become extreme in other ways. Some go well beyond Scripture in their expectations. They can distort even good into evil. But Scripture urges us to "put all things to the test: keep what is good and avoid every kind of evil. May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being—spirit, soul, and body—free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:21-23, TEV).

OUR ROLE AS HOPE-SHARERS

Our role is not to indulge in speculation as to when we expect the Lord will arrive. Rather, we are to “be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you” (1 Peter 3:15, TEV). As we speak to others about the hope within us, we are to tell them what Jesus means to us, and about our anticipation of meeting Him at His return and being together with Him for all eternity. Christian hope needs to be personal and real. We must think it through, then explain our reason for cherishing such a hope.

It is a privilege to be part of God’s plan to share His hope to a world that, like Flagstaff, Maine, is drowning in all its hopelessness!

Why does God invite us to participate with Him? Isn’t it because we can give the best testimony of what it is like to find hope after being hopeless, to discover it when we thought all hope was lost? As His children, He invites us to be part of His wonderful plan of salvation for humanity and to demonstrate the truth about God to the whole universe. Hope is an essential part of that plan, and not just the “frosting on the cake,” as someone once called Christian hope. Hope is far more substantial than that—in fact, it’s the main course! Our perspective is this: “Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:13, TEV).

Jesus tells us to lay up treasure in heaven—for that is where our hope will be realized (Col. 1:5). Our focus will not be on ourselves, but on others and the true values that God endorses.

Nor are we to dismiss anyone or anything as beyond hope. As Charles L. Allen said: “When you say a situation or a person is hopeless, you are slamming the door in the face of God.” We are to recognize in all those around us the same potential that God sees for the restored and redeemed children of the kingdom of hope.

Our hope in seeing Jesus soon really does make a difference. It has an effect in all areas of life and work and in our relationships and behavior. Coloring our attitude to the things of this world, it identifies true values and affects our approach to life itself. Even when the outlook may seem dim in human terms, God’s hope gives meaning and purpose to those “who against hope believed in hope” (Rom. 4:18). Such hope shapes family relationships, the use of money, the desire for possessions, our ambitions, career perspectives, and our plans for the future. If hope does not have such an impact, then it really has no power in our lives. We all need to be able to say, “The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him” (Lam. 3:25, NIV).

Though in the eagerness of pursuing our lives, we may become impatient—for what we want, even for the Second Coming itself—we need to remember that we must wait on God’s time, and not on our own plans so that “we through patience . . . might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Consequently we need to wake up to our responsibilities, and act “like men and women who believe” this hope!

PARABLE: HOPE ON THE BEACH OF THIS WORLD

On the beach in the gray-splashed coldness of a winter’s day stands a man. A vast bank of shingle stretches away to an infinity hidden by the mist, a huge ocean of white-washed silver spumes against the shore beneath a sky of tarnished metal scraped bare of clouds. The stranger stands staring at the point where earth and sea and sky meet. He is a lonely man under a lonely sky on a lonely beach.

The beach is not the fun-filled one of summer, crowded with people swimming, surfing, windsailing, waterskiing, paddling, sailing, picnicking, sunning, and building sand castles. Instead of an idyllic dream, the world he sees is reality in all its harshness:

the bitter cold, the threatening surf, the utter loneliness. Wrapping his coat tighter, he walks on and on down the beach.

It seemed another time, another place, another planet. The empty desolation reflected the man's mood, and he symbolized and represented all the human race. Stranded on the edge of an immense, uncrossable ocean, he walked the shoreline in the hope of finding something, but heard only the crunch of shingle underfoot. The man bent down, bowed low by troubles, then picked up a stone and rose. With a shout, a cry of desperation, he flung the pebble with all his might into the broken surface of the tossing sea. A splash, a few ripples, and it vanished. The cry itself went unheard among the crashing waves of eternity. Alone and unnoticed, he struggled on down the beach.

Finding a tiny stretch of sand, he crouched down and began to write with his finger, recording all his complaints, his hopes and fears, his need to know why he existed. In all his meaningless words he presented his tale in a passionate outpouring of his innermost thoughts. At the bottom he signed his name, and stood back to admire his beautiful creation, satisfied that he had at least recorded his protest. Moments later a massive breaker crashed in, sweeping over all his words. Then rushing back, the water left bare, unmarked sand. All was if it had never been. With sea-soaked shoes he sat and sobbed, his sighs swirling in the splashing spray drenching the beach.

Bravely he battled on until he discovered the flotsam on the shoreline, the relics of others who had gone before: the cans and bottles, the plastic cups and cigarette wrappers. Carefully he sifted this treasure in the vain hope of finding answers to his questions, something of value in all the trash. He searched for hours, collecting together all the trivial castoffs scattered along the shore. But in the end he had nothing, no joy in possessing, no answers among all the rusting cans and soggy papers, no hope in any of his pieces of collected junk

that stood piled up beside him like a memorial on the beach.

In his hopelessness he lay down, just another piece of flotsam thrown up by the tide, a dark shape abandoned in the midst of all this emptiness. Lost, lonely, helpless, hopeless, he waited as the light grew dim. It was the evening of the world, and as the cold bit deeper, he wondered if it was his last. Hungry, frightened, shivering, and intensely alone, he waited. He stared out over the bitter sea of separation and felt his own emptiness. Unable to do anything more, unable to help himself, unable to leave, he remained stranded on the beach.

But as he watched the far horizon, over the sea, another Man walked toward him. From the other side, impossibly heading toward the beach, arms outstretched as the waves subsided and the wind died to a gentle whisper. He came to embrace, to enfold hopelessness in eternal hope. The Man now arrived to save, to rescue, to transform. To remake hope from human hopelessness for the man on the beach.

The Son appeared in blazing splendor, a brilliant demonstration of absolute majesty clothed in the humblest love. Suddenly the whole scene changed. The sea glowed like molten lava, the sky shone with surrealist colors of green and blue and red—like emeralds, sapphires, and rubies rolling across the floor of heaven. The transformation was the work of a moment, a twinkling of an eye. Leaping to his feet, the man stood and shouted and sang. Caught up into all this glory, he himself altered—from the inside out. He saw, and as he did so, he now understood. As he repented and claimed the promise, he was redeemed. Hope made a difference now, as he recognized the truth of salvation. Then as the vision faded, he stood in silence with an overpowering sense of awe. The darkness approached, but in the twilight the man smiled, his heart full of endless hope, looking forward to the time he would be together forever with the Man—on the beach that edged the sea of glass.

Hope: Motivation for Mission

HOPE IS THE KEY

English crime writer Agatha Christie entitled one of her books *Fear Is the Key*. Some may see in her title a symbol of life, but for the Christian surely the opposite is true: *Hope is the key*.

For the Jesus hope is not only a belief that we assent to, but a motivation for life itself, an energizer that leads to action. It truly is the motivation for mission. The hope that we find encompassed in the gospel makes us want to share such glorious good news with others. For “we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5, NIV). Our mission is to illuminate the whole world with the saving hope of Jesus.

We can sum up the life of our message and mission in this blessed hope. Without such hope the gospel is meaningless—an empty promise, a worthless philosophy. For if there is no future together with God, then the present loses its value and, as Paul commented, without the hope of resurrection, all is in vain.

But because we have this transforming, incredible hope in being part of God’s glorious future, then we have all the reason in the world to want to share that same hope with those we meet. Hope is indeed the motivation for mission, because it is the key to a saving relationship with God, both now and eternally.

HOPE FOR A FRIGHTENED JOURNEY

“Is it supposed to do that?”

It was an urgent voice—the first sign I was sitting on a plane next to a passenger with a fear of flying. A set of white knuckles on the armrest accompanied the anxious question.

“Do what?” I asked. *A strange opening move in a conversation*, I thought.

“That noise. Is that normal?”

All I could hear were the engines at full throttle.

“Yes. Of course. This is takeoff,” I responded.

“Oh.” A rather faint and plaintive “oh.”

The rest of the flight involved me filling in the gaps of conversation when my fellow passenger obsessed on the aircraft noises again.

She (and it could just as easily have been a he, since flying still scares me some) admitted that she was on the plane only because she wanted to get to her dying grandmother. But every bank and turn made her gasp; every little bit of turbulence produced panic.

So we talked. About anything and everything. About what she did (a student and a nanny) and what I did (a newswriter and a pastor). About her family and mine, about life and death and meaning and purpose and . . .

And hope.

At that moment hope meant more to her than anything else. Hope that she would see her grandmother before the woman died. Hope that the plane would not fall out of the sky. Hope that she would arrive safely.

More than such immediate hopes, she sought hope beyond—a hope that inevitably means God’s hope.

She did believe in God, she conceded. Recently, in fact, she had begun to pray again. At that moment she was praying especially hard, she told me with a nervous smile.

Her grandmother's terminal illness was really affecting her. An only child, she had grown up with Mom and Grandma, and Grandma meant much to her. But now, at 90, Grandma's life was ebbing away. My fellow passenger was aching for hope.

Only God's blessed hope meets such needs. Only the promise of God, who never lies, can ease the pain of our own passing mortality. And only the power of God can make such hopes reality.

So we talked—about what this God of hope is really like, how Jesus shows us this God who saves and heals, and how He gives us life now, and eternally, as we choose His way.

As we bumped down to the runway, she clutched my arm. Safe on the runway, she expressed her happy relief, as the hope of the journey became the reality of solid ground.

She left—I believe—with more than just hope to survive a frightening plane flight. God gives wonderful, glorious, amazing hope that transforms a frightened journey through life into a new existence of meaning and purpose, joy and confidence.

We have this hope, we share this hope—hope that flies beyond death into an eternity together with the God of the blessed hope.

HOPE MAKES US BOLD

“Because we have this hope, we are very bold” (2 Cor. 3:12, TEV).

A holy boldness comes from the hope we hold in Jesus. It is a hope that gives us conviction and assurance for whatever challenges we face. Most of all, it encourages us to share the promise of an eternal future with the God we love and adore.

Sometimes we see witnessing as a burden, or as an activity we need to perform as part of our Christian duty. We may even dread having to go out and “evangelize.” But such an attitude misses the point completely. Our role is not to perform some duty or complete some requirement. Rather, our joy is to let

others know the wonderful hope and the delight of God's salvation. We are not preaching ourselves, but Jesus as Lord, and the wonder of knowing Him as our closest friend, the one who both saves us now and returns to take us to be with Him for all eternity. The gospel is no somber religion, but a hope-filled message of assurance in a loving, saving God.

“We put our hope in the Lord; he is our protector and our help. We are glad because of him; we trust in his holy name. May your constant love be with us, Lord, as we put our hope in you” (Ps. 33:20-22, TEV).

Our responsibility is to let this joy-filled hope shine through us, so that those around us recognize the incredible value of what we have. “For it is not ourselves that we preach; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. The God who said, ‘Out of darkness the light shall shine!’ is the same God who made his light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:5, 6, TEV).

As a result of this wonderful divine treasure we possess, God's saving light of hope illuminates the world. Our hope-motivated mission is to help everyone in our dying world see how much they need Jesus. “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NIV).

The conviction we share in the hope of soon seeing Jesus at His return is what gives our outreach activities their drive and power. The slogan “the gospel message to all the world in this generation” is simply a summary of the results of sharing the gospel of hope. The Second Coming hope component of the Advent message gives it urgency and power, and assures us of an eternal future at home with our loving Lord.

The church today operates from a number of motivations, all relevant. We wish to alleviate hunger and misery and to im-

prove people's education and life prospects. Each of us is committed to helping others have a healthy lifestyle. Yet the truly Advent part of our beliefs is what makes us the church of hope, the ones looking for Jesus' soon return.

A COMMUNITY OF HOPE

Of all people, we are the ones who wish to claim the future in the present. The future hope is what makes us a community in the present. Why? Because "the future belongs to those who belong to God. This is hope" (W. T. Purkiser).

In the words of Zechariah 9:12 we are "prisoners of hope." Now, does that mean prisoners who hope, or those imprisoned by hope?

Both meanings are appropriate. We are strangers and pilgrims (Heb. 11:13) on this earth who hope for a better land. And we are also "imprisoned" by hope. As hope fills us as a people, we are both contained by hope and a community of hope.

Once we lived our lives in rebellion. But now, saved by hope, we have become heirs of the promise—the promise of God and the hope of eternal life. "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:3-7, NIV).

Since we are truly a community of hope, we must recognize where we came from and what our future is. But we cannot be proud of ourselves, since we cannot save ourselves—it is all of God. As a result of all that God has done, we have "become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

Consequently, the message we have to share is very simple. It is the same message that has given us hope, and which we pass on: "A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior" (Titus 1:2, 3, NIV).

"A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life." The church of hope could have no better motto. It's worth just pausing and contemplating the phrase, because it sums up our message, our theology, and our motivation. It captures the foundation, the basis for all that we do, think, and say. Our faith, and the knowledge we gain, rests solidly on the God-given hope of eternal life.

As we follow the Lord's command to make disciples, we pattern ourselves after His example and point people both to a better life here and now, and to the wonders of the hope of eternal life with Jesus when He returns.

HOPE RENEWS STRENGTH

Hoping in God gives us not only strength to live but also power to share His glorious good news. Trusting in God as our source of hope brings assurance and conviction. And preaching in God enables us to transmit to others that same hope to live for the God-filled present and for the God-promised future. As a result, "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isa. 40:31, NIV).

That's why it is important to hope in the Lord. It's our only source of spiritual strength, because we have none of our own. Our hope's foundation rests in God and His eternal majesty and power, expressed in the humility and love of Christ.

If your hope grows dim, go back to the Bible and restudy

the “hope promises,” then pray for the restrengthening power of God’s hope. Hope recovered brings restored motivation and drives us to share that hope with those around us. As we celebrate that hope, “we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast” (Heb. 3:6, NIV).

While we may express ourselves in different ways, the heart of the message of hope remains the same. Our boldness and courage lie in our conviction of its reality. We boast not in ourselves, but in the God we preach and teach, the God of that exciting future together with Him that makes such a difference in the way we experience the present.

As a people we need that revitalizing strength of hope as we proclaim God’s salvation. But as we tell others, it also strengthens us. As Bible translator J. B. Phillips wrote: “The gospel is nothing but a frozen asset unless it is communicated.” We need to recognize that truth and get busy communicating hope!

HERALD OF HOPE

Patrick, the missionary to Ireland in the fifth century, is one of the best examples of a “herald of hope” as he brought the goodness of the God of hope to a pagan society lost in the darkness of evil. Almost single-handedly this man of God totally transformed Irish society in a single generation. He was born into a Christian family on the west coast of Britain. During his youth pirates captured him, taking him to Ireland, where he became a slave-shepherd at the age of 16. With little food or clothing, his experience was truly one of harsh and brutal treatment. After six years he escaped and returned home. But the image of his former captors and masters living without the hope of Christianity led him to return, much against his family’s will.

His father was a deacon, his grandfather a priest. But after his experience as a slave, Patrick had learned the really vital aspects of the gospel, and he now lived the hope. Daily he expected

death because of his preaching, but he determined to continue whatever the threats and dangers, so that the Irish might come to know the Lord as a loving and compassionate Father.

In his “Confession” Patrick writes of his experience of having known the love of God for him as a father for his son, of discovering the meaning and purpose of life, and of being thrilled by the resurrection hope. He quotes only the Bible, and bases his life on scriptural principles. His was a simple and uncomplicated faith that preached hope to the hopeless.

His witness produced an Ireland that changed from dark despair and human sacrifice to a land that glorified Jesus as Savior and Lord, the living hope and returning King.

In his prayer, known as the “Breastplate of Patrick,” he affirms his hope: “I arise today . . . in the hope of the resurrection to meet with reward” (translation by Kuno Meyer; <http://elvis.rowan.edu/~kilroy/JEK/03/17.html>). And in his “Confession” he looks forward to the fulfillment of his hope at the second coming of Jesus:

“He [Jesus] was made man, and, having defeated death, was received into heaven by the Father; and He hath given Him all power over all names in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess to Him that Jesus Christ is Lord and God, in whom we believe, and whose advent we expect soon to be, judge of the living and of the dead” (translation by Ludwig Bieler; <http://www.ccel.org/p/patrick/confession/confession.html>).

The consequence of such a dynamic hope-filled life was a nation turned to God, a whole society transformed, and a new Christian community living by the Bible and looking forward in hope to the return of their newly discovered Savior. It is a powerful illustration of the motivation of hope in a committed Christian, leading us to share God’s good news of salvation and an eternal future.

CHAPTER 6

Hope: Too Much or Not Enough?

MISPLACED HOPES

On our first visit to the United States back in 1980 we decided we needed to buy a car in order to get around. We paid a visit to the local car auction and successfully bid for a Chevy station wagon. The auctioneer made the car appear the best buy since the United States had bought Alaska! (Oh, and don't ask me the model; as far as I was concerned, it was just a car!) Not knowing much about American cars, I looked under the bonnet (sorry, hood) and checked to see that there was an engine present, then made sure that it had a spare tyre (sorry, tire) in the boot (sorry, trunk). (And you're telling me we speak the same language?)

Anyway, we drove off, more than pleased with our purchase. I had high hopes for this wonderful product of American engineering. It really did look good, and on the surface I couldn't see anything wrong. I was willing to trust the claims of the auctioneer.

You have to have hope, right? You want to hope, to believe, to have faith. I was sure we had found the car we had been hoping for.

However, during the next few days we discovered a few

Hope: Too Much or Not Enough?

idiosyncrasies. The air conditioning would occasionally start up for no apparent reason and begin wailing like a banshee. The first time it happened I nearly drove off the road. But after a while it became almost an accepted example of car eccentricity, and it was fun to see how unsuspecting passengers reacted.

It did seem to be running a bit rough at times too, and I wasn't sure that flames normally came out of the end of the tailpipe. But it still ran. On very smooth tires, which I suspected were a special American adaptation of Formula 1 slicks to help you drive faster. After having plowed into a snowbank, however, I discovered that they were just worn bald.

But the really scary aspect of my misplaced hopes and blind trust hit even me as we returned from picking someone up at the airport in Chicago. We drove the 90 miles back home, sailing along the freeway until we exited. As we slowed down on the off-ramp I heard a strange jangling sound. Stopping, I looked under the car. Nothing. I opened the windows and drove a few feet. It was as if someone were rattling stones in a can. Then I remembered an old prank from English weddings of putting gravel inside the hubcaps of the "Just Married" car.

I took off a hubcap. Instead of gravel, I found three nuts and bolts that held the wheel onto the axle totally sheared off. Only one still held the wheel in place! And that was well worn through too. Shuddering, I checked the other front wheel. Same problem, with just two nuts still in place.

We drove the few miles home at five miles an hour. Thankfully we made it safely. Then I checked with a mechanically minded neighbor. He shook his head in amazement, and then told me I'd been driving a car all that time with the wrong-sized wheels on the front. Someone had removed the right wheels and replaced them with the wrong ones—maybe just before taking it to the auction.

How important it is to know your vehicle. Hope without a

sure foundation is futile. I had hoped too much, and misplaced my hope in the assurances of those who obviously could not deliver. To trust the words of an auctioneer—"Great car! Just serviced! Like new!"—is foolishness. You need to know for yourself that you're traveling safe. The only way you can really be sure is to check it all out for yourself—and have a definite idea of what you're looking for.

The same applies in the spiritual world. You have to examine all the evidence and not just trust mere claims. To believe just what anyone tells you is as foolish as my driving that Chevy death trap. I learned fast.

In the material world you must read the owner's manual. Check out the manufacturer's advice. And don't you owe it to yourself and your eternal destiny to do the same in the spiritual realm? Make sure your hopes are properly grounded in the sure and certain promises of the God who does not lie.

TOO MUCH HOPE?

Is it possible to have too much hope? Some may say no. But as one proverb says, "too much hope deceives," and we can encounter danger in overanticipation. For example, it is possible to overstress the timing of hope, to say that its fulfillment is absolutely imminent. This can set believers up for disappointment and despair.

Paul addresses this particular problem of "overhoping," of making expectation so intense that some Christians were even saying that Jesus had already returned. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Thess. 2:1, 2, NIV).

The apostle says that we must reject that kind of over-

expectation, especially any time-related prophecy that says the Advent hope is going to be fulfilled next week, next month, next year—or whenever.

The trouble is that disappointment and doubt often surface once the vividness of too much hope dies away. After we have preached an extreme position we face the other danger of giving up on hope altogether, or pushing it so far into the background that it no longer makes any impact on our lives. In truth, for most Christians today, the greater problem is not one of overhoping, but of not hoping enough.

NOT ENOUGH HOPE?

The biblical call is to have an enduring hope—not one that flares up for a while, only to cool down and die. The hope given by God is not temporary, like all things human. It is absolutely sure and certain, and will endure until its fulfillment. The Lord summons us to "hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

Hoping to the end! While it may not be the easiest part of Christian life, it is essential nevertheless. Though the excitement of our first love of the Lord may mature to a sure certainty as we live with Him, that should not mean a dimming of our greatest hope. Quite the opposite: as time continues on, and we grow older in hope, it should blaze brighter.

Surely this is no time for giving up on hope. Sadly, many believers in the blessed hope seem to feel let down, as if what they had hoped for so earnestly has not been fulfilled as they had expected. We need to remember that we are to wait for the Lord according to His timetable, not ours.

The Bible reminds us that we are to look forward to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Hope does not depend on us and what we can fulfill—it is anchored in the

rock-solid assurance of God Himself. That is why this hope can bring such joy to the present.

DAMAGED HOPE

For many reasons, hope can become damaged. Sometimes we equate hope with our feelings, and when we do not feel happy, we assume we are losing hope. But the hope we should have is confidence not in how we may feel, but in the assurance of God Himself. The next time you feel less than hopeful, remind yourself of these words from the Psalms: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Ps. 43:5, NIV).

Put your hope in God! Always remember that it does not come from us but rather from God.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13-35) expressed some of the saddest words of dashed and disappointed hope. They told Jesus, whom they did not recognize, “we had hoped.” Although they were actually walking with Christ, journeying in the presence of divine hope Himself, they could not see any reason to go on hoping. In fact, they spoke of hope in the past tense: “we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (verse 21, NIV).

But as Jesus, the very source of hope, then explained to them all the scriptures concerning Himself, their eyes were opened—finally they saw! Hope blazed bright again. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” (verses 30-32, NIV).

AN UNSURPRISED HOPE

Of all people, we should be constantly aware of the coming of what we hope for! “But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled” (1 Thess. 5:4-6, NIV).

As the community of hope that looks forward to the return of our loving Lord, we are “sons of the light and sons of the day.” We must be people who recognize the light God has given us, and then live in that light, because we have come “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Consequently, nothing should catch us unaware when the Lord does return and completes His promise, fulfilling the blessed hope. We should not be asleep, living our lives unmindful of what God has promised, but “alert and self-controlled.” Our actions should reflect that we are a faith community of hope, and that individually we are *awake* to the working of hope in our own lives.

DESPERATE HOPES

Sometimes the reason for hope is a desperate one. People feel compelled to hope, for if they do not they fear being overwhelmed with thoughts of doom and judgment. If you decide to hope because of the terrors of the alternatives, that too can lead to a crisis of hope.

The myth of a resurrected national hero is common to many cultures. Whether it is King Arthur returning to his court at Camelot to answer the summons to free England, or Joan of Arc fighting once more for French freedom, or King Vaclav riding forth again at the head of the Knights of Blanik to save Bohemia, the legends point to a national hope in past glories.

The latter legend became embroidered during the dark

days of the Second World War. Writer Frantisek Langer tells a story of how some Czechs refound the sword of their hero Vaclav or Wenceslas—a symbol of national pride and hope—during the Nazi occupation of the city of Prague in 1939. The legend had related how King Wenceslas (of the Christmas carol's fame) had possessed a magical sword, and that it had been hidden in the stones of the Charles Bridge that crosses the river Vltava in the center of Prague.

The sword was supposedly rediscovered in the middle of the bridge by a group of children as they walked home on a snowy Christmas Eve. There before them glowed and flashed the sword, and one of the boys picked it up and hid it under his coat. Wondering what to do, the children tried to unsheathe the sword, but could not. Eventually they decided to keep their sword of hope hidden, ready for Wenceslas when he returned.

And they still wait. History marches on; the Nazi occupation ended. No Wenceslas came to the rescue, then or during the time of the Communist oppression—or now. It was a story of hope for a time of trouble. But in the end, it was a misguided hope as people waited for a mythical hero to be resurrected and to come to the aid of his former land.

And it is also sad, because what is the point of waiting for Arthur or Joan of Arc or Wenceslas to return from the dead when the Savior of the world is already resurrected?

In the words of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*:

“The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.”

—Edward FitzGerald

God's hope is not a passing and inconsequential one. Nor is

it a hope that vanishes like snow in the sun—as useless as a hidden sword or as insubstantial as mythical Camelot. God offers hope sure and certain—the sure and certain hope not of resurrected legendary heroes but of *the Resurrection*—of Jesus and you and me. It is a hope based on one who is already resurrected and returned, the Lord of the universe, risen with healing in His wings and soon to reclaim His kingdom for all eternity.

For example, if your reason for embracing the blessed hope is nothing more than fear of punishment, then it may certainly be true that you hope “too much.” As life seems to get better, you may then end up hoping “not enough.”

BALANCED HOPE

We all need to ask ourselves why we hope. Our answer should not first and foremost be just to escape the horrors of judgment, or the disaster scenarios of the end-time. No, the reason for hope is not a negative one—but the ultimately positive reason of wanting to be with Jesus. All such fearful hopes need to be replaced by the hope that God alone gives, since “perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18, NIV).

God draws us, never forces us. With a loving, compassionate heart, He holds out hope to us, and does not compel us to hope “or else.” God's perfect love drives out our fear and replaces it with the desire to hope based not on threats, but on our wanting to be with the Lord who loves us.

Ours is to be a balanced hope, avoiding any extremism and resting its confidence in God, the source of our hope. We may still have questions, but we can remain confident in the trustworthiness of our Lord, who has already proved Himself completely worthy and reliable.

Our evangelistic message is not one of repentance based on

threats of doom and disaster, but an invitation to come to love God before we miss out on the privilege. Such hope is not “fire insurance” against the horrors of hell or end-time destruction—for that is mere self-preservation and self-centeredness. Rather our hope is a longing to be with the One who saves and heals and loves—God Himself.

We are the ones who long for his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). That longing is our intense desire to be with God, not an attempt to use this hope to escape punishment. Hope is not self-serving, but a natural reaction of the reborn child of God. We eagerly desire the time when “God’s home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared” (Rev. 21:3, 4, TEV).

Practical Hope

ON STACKING WOOD

Today we stacked wood. All of us, the whole family. Now tired, but satisfied, we relax inside. Daughter Rebekah snuggles close. “Now we’ll be nice and warm and cuddly for the whole winter.” She wriggles comfortably at the thought.

The late-afternoon sun caught the sugar maples as we’d worked, turning the red-orange leaves into miniature flaming sunsets down the street. As we stacked the slabs of wood the air chilled and our breath turned white in the stillness. It was evening, a time of ending.

Yet it was an activity of hope, of expectation, because we hoped to see the winter through.

Ana picked up the splinters and chippings. “Good kindling for starting the fire,” she told herself. My son Paul carried one log at a time. “He won’t die of stress,” Ana commented. Rebekah hopped, skipped, jumped—never content simply to walk carrying the wood. I piled it up methodically, building for the future.

As the woodpile grew, so did my happiness. Preparation. Ready for the cold. Comfort and assurance. But most of all, hope.

Hope for warmth in the death of the year, when all outside is fading and ending. Hope for the future, a little permanence

in a world full of change. Hope for the chance to see another spring, to witness again new birth.

Stacking wood. That's what we're doing now in the present. For the winter comes, and the end, and death.

But in the stacking of wood we state our hope to live again, not cramped and confined by the snows of winter but free in the warm meadows of forever. Our hope focuses not in the woodpile itself, but in preparing for an eternity with the One who comes to end our winter.

Time to start stacking.

HOPE IS LIVING

George Iles defines Christian hope as "faith holding out its hands in the dark." More than anything else, hope has to be practical and functional. It has to work. In the same way as you hold out your hands in the dark when you cannot see, hope does just that, actively walking and expecting, not just sitting still and waiting.

Hope is living, both in the sense that it is the way we live, and that hope itself is alive! As Peter reminds us: "Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3, TEV).

This is not "pie in the sky by and by." We need to understand that what we hope for affects how we act and relate not just in the future but here in the present. In grief or in joy, in good times or bad, hope has a major part to play. Most of all, it is intensely practical.

Our hope is not some dim and vague longing for something better, but of knowing God and His salvation now and of having an assured place in His kingdom forever.

That is the hope we are *born* into. Notice the word. Not a hope we pick up casually or one we work out for ourselves. We

enter the living hope because Jesus gives us new birth into it. In a sense, the whole process of the new birth is based on hope—the hope that God can do as He has promised, that His salvation is secure, and that one day all this world with its evil and sadness and death will be swallowed up in God's ultimate victory.

Notice what this new birth of hope brings: "And so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away. They are for you, who through faith are kept safe by God's power for the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the end of time" (1 Peter 1:4, 5, TEV).

Here is where hope really makes a practical difference. If our hope is in an immortal inheritance with God, what do the things of this world matter? As Jesus told His hearers, we're not to store up treasure here where the corrupting rust of evil and the invading moths of loss will take it all from us. No, our storehouse is safe with God, and it contains all that is good and right and pure and best. Forget the drive for material possessions that just satisfy the physical. Look for the spiritual investment!

HOPE WHATEVER HAPPENS

The problems and troubles of life may seem overwhelming. Fears about job security, financial worries, family crises, lawsuits, damaged relationships, health worries, bereavement—all can lead to so many kinds of grief. But that's when we should live the hope no matter what is happening to us (see 1 Peter 1:6, 7).

Not that we should think that the troubles are deliberate tests sent by an investigating God. Difficulties afflict everyone—it is our response to them that is important. In the story of Job the tests came from the evil one, and God permitted them as a way of revealing the depth of the patriarch's commitment to God. We need to remain firm to the hope we have committed ourselves to. Once again, this is why our hope is

truly living—we live it out in the fabric of our lives, whether times are good or bad.

See how Job clung to his hope in his Redeemer: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27, NIV).

Though such words of hope may be easy to read and to say during times of peace, they are far harder to hang on to when you are in a crisis. In times of trouble people may vent very harsh feelings. Some may even want to follow the advice of Job’s wife: “Curse God and die.” It’s easy to understand the depths of pain that lead to such angry attacks on God and His wisdom.

We also remember that some attempts at showing sympathy can appear trite and unthoughtful. Telling someone who is suffering that they have only themselves to blame, as did Job’s friends, is hardly helpful. Nor is it particularly wise to express some pious comment about God when you refuse to offer practical help yourself. The hope we have means that we are messengers of hope and will do whatever is in our power to demonstrate that our hope is *practical*.

Most of all, our living of the hope brings the joy and salvation of God: “You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him” (1 Peter 1:8, 9, TEV).

Why can we rejoice? Because of salvation! The joy we experience comes from recognizing that God is saving us, that He is right now fulfilling His promises, and that the blessed hope will be that glorious reality.

This is not some passing excitement or foolish sense of fun. Rather it is the deep-seated joy that is totally sure of hope’s ob-

jective. The joy of the Christian is wrapped up in the definite purposes of God, who will bring to pass all that He has promised. From this point of view, hope is more than human yearning—it is absolute conviction. Because we know our Lord, and He has told us what He will do, we find ourselves “filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (verse 8, NIV).

Of course, we are not beings that can be always joyful in an outward sense. However, the joy that God gives us is similar to the “peace that passes understanding” and the attitude of “pray without ceasing.” It is an inner attitude, a sure conviction that we can safely rest our lives upon. No one can steal that kind of joy away.

HOPE MEANS SETTING YOUR MIND ON GOD

“Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:13, TEV).

Great words. But what do they mean? It’s back to the gospel and the fact that every part of our lives must express God’s grace. That means unlearning our self-righteousness, denying ourselves anger, restraining our sinful appetites, filling our days with prayer and praise to the God of grace.

It is through God’s graciousness—the free gifts that He gives us—that we even exist, that we receive His salvation, and that we have an eternal life to look forward to. When Jesus returns at His second coming, then grace will become complete as He transforms us from mortal to immortal, from perishable to imperishable (see 1 Cor. 15).

In case we should be focusing on our own works—that is, attempting to make ourselves righteous—Scripture reminds us that everything depends on the grace that God gives. Our hope itself is just as much grace as any other element in God’s plan of salvation.

But we too must act in order to hope. In fact, as Peter says in this same verse, “So then, have your minds ready for action” (1 Peter 1:13, TEV).

Ready for action! That’s the command given here. We are to prepare our minds for doing. One thing a Christian cannot be is inactive. God calls us to a busy life lived in hope, one sharing the truth He has committed to us. More than that, we are to be “self-controlled”—in other words, not hasty or overzealous or foolish. And should we think that any of this is of our own doing, the rest of the verse makes it clear where our focus needs to be.

Because our hope is not of this world, we should “be obedient to God, and do not allow your lives to be shaped by those desires you had when you were still ignorant. Instead, be holy in all that you do, just as God who called you is holy” (verses 14, 15, TEV).

Hope means rejecting the principles that many others so easily seem to accept. Without being “pretentiously pious,” God’s people are called to be holy. Holiness is allowing God’s character to reflect in our characters. We acknowledge that His ways and His principles are just and right. Our hope points to the same objective: “Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Prov. 24:14, NIV).

The hope of the wise is God’s hope—because they hope in God! Knowing God as He truly is gives us the greatest confidence, not because of what He has promised but because of who is doing the promising. In the same way as salvation must come from outside ourselves, so must our hope. That is the only hope worth trusting. Anything else only leads to disappointment and failure. “When a wicked man dies, his hope perishes; all he expected from his power comes to nothing” (Prov. 11:7, NIV).

God wants us to demonstrate our hope in the most practi-

cal way we can, revealing that we have set our minds on the God of hope and that we live our lives through Him.

JOHNNY BARNES: THE PRACTICAL FACE OF HOPE

Every weekday morning Johnny Barnes stands by the side of the road in Hamilton, Bermuda, and waves and calls to passing traffic. A seemingly pointless activity. Yet because of his smiling ministry, he has become a national institution in Bermuda. He even has a statue to prove it.

Johnny began his unique witness more than 30 years ago. Now he’s Bermuda’s official greeter, receiving media attention from around the globe. I had the privilege of meeting him just recently.

“I get calls from all over the world,” he says, smiling. “Last week it was a lady from the BBC in England, who told me mine was one of a very few pictures that had gone all around the world. Many people call and write, and I’m happy to hear from them.”

Why does he do it? Because “when you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have to let your light shine any way you can,” Johnny replies. Besides, “my mother used to tell me, ‘Don’t let me hear that you saw someone and didn’t say hello to them.’ I like to let people know, and tell them, ‘Someone cares for you, someone loves you.’”

Johnny Barnes is the face of hope to more than three quarters of all Bermudan workers, since they all have to pass his roadside spot every morning on their commute. But is that all it is? I wonder. Just a smile and a greeting on the way to work?

“Sometimes I can have a longer conversation,” he adds. “One person told me last week I was doing a wonderful thing that gives people a lift in the mornings. One man couldn’t sleep, and when I arrived at 4.30 a.m. he was waiting for me. I talked with him for about an hour and prayed for him. He felt so much better and could go back home. Another man came, and

I prayed for him. I heard later he was thinking about suicide, and because I cared and told him I loved him and God did too, he didn't do it."

He says that what he does is one of God's ways of sharing hope and love. "God is using it in a mighty way. I'm just a little instrument in His hand to use as He may choose. I'm not here for the fame or the honor or the glory. I'm here to be used in any way the Lord sees fit. At the foot of the cross, nothing belongs to me."

He has to get to bed early so he can get up by 2:30 a.m. He has breakfast at 3:30 before he sets out. "I enjoy what I'm doing," he comments. "When I get up, I thank the Lord for another day. When people aren't happy, I tell them it takes more muscles to frown than to smile. So why not use those smiling muscles all the time? I'm always smiling."

How much longer does he intend to be Bermuda's face of hope? "This year I'll be 78. I will keep going as long as the good Lord gives me strength. When they asked me who would take over from me, I said the good Lord would take care of that. It's not up to me."

And what about that statue? "They promised they'll put up a statue of me after I die." He smiles again, more wryly this time. "I told them, 'Why wait until I die? I'd enjoy it more while I'm alive!'"

He gives a wide arms-open greeting. People honk their horns, stop to chat. It seems that he knows everybody. "They're happy for a bit of spiritual uplift," Johnny comments. "We all need hope and love in our lives. Too often people say 'I love you' for selfish reasons. I ask God to make sure that when I say it, it is godly love."

He's still smiling as I leave. The face of hope—God's hope smiling through a human face.

Hope on the Inside

SONG OF HOPE IN WINTER'S COLD

The snow had come, unlooked for and unwanted. Despite the white beauty all around, I had much to do, and here was another unwelcome delay to the day. I left the safe warmth of the house and trudged out to the car as the snowstorm swirled around me. Thick it came, and fast, wrapping me in its fierce coldness like a mantle of ice.

No, not today. Not any day like this. Why now? I just don't need this. I have so much to do it's not funny. I'm too busy. Enough already!

Errands to run. People to see. Meetings to attend. Work to do. Life to live.

Just as I reached for the car door to wrench it open in annoyance and frustration that became worse as I realized I'd have to clean off the windows before I could leave, something stopped me in my snowy tracks.

A pure, lilting birdsong like tinkling crystals descended with the snowflakes.

I could hardly see anything in the blizzard. Why on earth would a bird be singing today of all days? If I were a bird, I'd be hidden deep inside some welcoming evergreen, shivering and puffing up my feathers against the freezing cold. But no, this brave bird was singing in the snowstorm, challenging the

elements with its melody.

Peering through the onrushing ice missiles, I tried to catch a glimpse of this winter songster at the top of the cherry tree, holding on to a bare twig against the whirling gale as if daring it to blow him from his perch. A goldfinch, singing his heart out as he whistled against the wind. It was an unseasonal song, but one that challenged me every bit as much as the elements.

Why should the creature be singing? I could think of no reason, for no bird nests in January snows. He had no territory to defend, no rivals to fight, no mate to lure. Instead he had just a delight in song—a snowsong to remind me that life is more than all my daily cares and burdens.

Like Thomas Hardy's "Darkling Thrush" who sang for him in winter, "when Frost was spectre-grey"—

"In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom."

Just a bird singing. Just notes on a scale. Just music on the wind. And for what?

My hand outstretched toward the door handle, I stopped, frozen not by cold but by enchantment and realization. A dawning that seeped into my thoughts of a reality beyond all this fussing and fighting, all this running to and fro, all this getting and spending and laying waste our powers. The world *is* too much with us.

Now I stood and listened, the only audience in this winter concert hall, the only ears to hear this unique masterpiece. And I thought of what it meant, on such a bitter day as this.

Like Hardy again:

"So little cause for carolings

Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around . . . "

Nothing in this bleak midwinter gave any indication of happy expectation, offered no reason for such delightful, joyful music. And then I thought of how Hardy ends his poem of praise to his singer:

"That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware."

I shook my head. No! I was not unaware. For I did know of the blessed hope, the reason for any such singing for joy. This blessed hope "trembles through" all our existence here, a reminder that this world is not everything, and that nothing in this life can ever compare to the future we anticipate, the sure hope that is as certain as the promises of God Himself.

As the song concluded, as the bird took flight and disappeared into the snow-filled air, the silence of winter descended as heavy as the blanket of white all around me. It was as if it had never been.

But in my heart I carried the memory of that song—a reminder of joy in the blessed hope that makes all the monotony and trouble of our life here as nothing in comparison to our God-filled future. Days may be filled with busyness, but our eternity is assured.

HOPE ON THE INSIDE

Hope can only exist on the inside. Intensely personal and internal, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Jesus' appeal to you and to me is to take His promised hope and make it personal. In your mind see yourself there eagerly awaiting as Jesus comes. Look toward your own eternal life to-

gether with Jesus. And because of that blessed hope, you can then walk with Jesus day by day, living the life He gives until He returns to fulfill His wondrous promise (see Mal. 4:2).

Make hope real for yourself—on the inside!

God promises that “the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel” (Col. 1:5, NIV) will indeed come to pass.

Faith and love spring from hope! Thus they are just as much gifts of our gracious God of hope as any other aspect of salvation. And that hope is the secure hope stored up by God in heaven for all those who trust in Him. And what will heaven be like? “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9, NIV).

You want to know about hope on the inside? Reflect on God and His promises, and how that can keep you assured and trusting despite whatever life may bring. This is the message of the gospel—not one that makes us proud or arrogant, but does produce loyalty and conviction. The promise comes from God, who “cannot lie” (see Heb. 6:18).

Our assurance is that “we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (verse 19, NIV). Anchored! That’s the rock-solid attitude of hope, a perspective that looks beyond the things of this world to the vital realities of God’s kingdom.

In the words of the English proverb: “If fortune torments me, hope contents me.” Such hope is not some bland and unsubstantial wish that may or may not come to pass, but a certain and definite future. Each one of us needs to believe in what God has said, then take Him at His word. Although we must avoid obsessively dwelling on the future blessings, we must still acknowledge the reality of that hope God has stored up for each one who has accepted Jesus.

God says to each of us, personally and individually, “There

is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Prov. 23:18, NIV). “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

As a result, “by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (Gal. 5:5, NIV).

RED BIKE

I was 5 years old and wanted a real bike. I’d had toy bikes, and a tricycle that was fun for a while and had been stable enough to keep me from crashing too much. But now I longed for one like the bigger boys had. Besides constantly mentioning it to my parents, I thought about it almost every moment and even dreamed about it. My hope was strong and enduring—I would one day have a bike of my own. Soon.

Of course I dreamed of what my new bike would be like. But the exact specification was not the most important thing. As long as it worked. I could see myself flying down the street, the wind rushing past my face, my heart pounding with the thrill of speed.

But for my parents I offered a slightly different set of reasons. It would be a good thing to learn how to ride a bike, I assured them—everyone ought to know such an important life skill. And I could ride it to school. And run errands. And so on.

But in my dreams, I just wanted to be free, to ride, to fly across the world on my new bike. I held on to my hope, trusting it would come true.

Then eventually, after an eternity of weeks, my birthday arrived. Could it be the time . . . ? My hope was high, vibrant.

All through the family present-giving ceremony my parents were smiling. We were hardly rich, yet I always had good birthdays. But as I looked around that day, I didn’t see anything that even vaguely looked like a bike. My hope sank like a stone. I had

wanted it so badly that now I blinked back tears. But still my parents smiled.

Then, in the end, they led me out to the back of the house. There, leaning against the wall, was a bright-red bike with a red ribbon tied to the handlebars! I could hardly believe my eyes. My hope had come true, fulfilled, achieved.

I shouted for joy and jumped on the bike—and promptly fell off again. My parents laughed as they picked me up, telling me that I had time to learn. Then my dad explained about the bike. It wasn't exactly new. In fact, it was quite old and had been severely damaged.

But my father had taken the broken bike and had welded it back together. You could see the weld as a swelling where the crossbar met the fork. The paint job was a bit rough—the brushstrokes stood out. And the handlebars were a little off from straight. But it didn't matter to me—it was my bike. Painted bright red, the wheels cleaned up, the brakes and tires all brand-new.

My hope had come completely true. Although at first I fell many times, before long I was riding, flying free with the wind against my face. I saw the world from a whole new viewpoint. Liberated, I went places I'd never been before as I explored a whole new universe on my red bike. It was the best thing that I had ever had.

From that point on I realized that it was not wanting some physical possession that mattered, but that hope is what leads us on. The gift was not the bike—not even the red bike I treasured so much—but hope alive, the personal hope that sets us free.

That bike lasted me several years. Eventually I outgrew it. I have no idea what happened to that bike I had hoped for so much. The physical passes, breaks, rusts—and even if we fix it up for a while, it breaks again and finally becomes useless.

Yet from that gift of my long-expected red bike I learned

personally the meaning of living in hope, a hope that opens doors, that gives meaning and purpose in the present and an anticipation of the future. Hope on the inside.

HOPE PERSONALLY ASSURED

God gives us this personal hope—hope on the inside—so that we will have total confidence in His assured promise. He tells us to “continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (Col. 1:23, NIV).

Many varieties of hope exist in the world today. But the gospel holds out only one hope—and that is the Jesus hope. The hope of Jesus is both hope *in* Jesus, and the hope *of* Jesus, that is, the hope that He also held.

If there is one thing the devil wants to take from Jesus' followers it is their hope. Once Satan can dim the bright flame of hope, if not even extinguish it, then he can raise fear, doubt, and despair to attack the Christian. But if we let nothing move us from the hope of the gospel, then we remain secure. In fact, such a hope is so real it seems as if we almost have what we are hoping for, because it is so secure. Hope so real that we already have it!

The appeal is to “put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore” (Ps. 131:3, NIV).

We must not conclude that we should never take personal responsibility for making sure our hope is real and active. Each of us still needs to exercise our decisions of choice. But we are strengthened by knowing that when we are in union with Jesus it allows Him to change and remake us into His image day by day. This is our hope, one that grows throughout our lives and looks for its final fulfillment in glory. Our hope of glory is only through Christ in us—it is not of ourselves. Glory comes from God, the same source as our hope!

HOPE INSIDE YOU

Jeremiah describes this internal hope in Lamentations—a part of Scripture often considered as rather depressing. On the contrary, here is Jeremiah’s testimony to his hope on the inside:

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope” (Lam. 3:21-29, NIV).

What is involved here? Memory, recognition of God’s love and trustworthiness, action in seeking God. And while it may not be the easiest thing to do, hope demands much waiting. But the most important aspect of such a “confession of hope” is that it is real and personal. Notice how the preceding passage expresses the close relationship between the “I” and the Lord. Hope without such a personal and practical aspect is pointless.

Similarly, Paul, when brought to trial before Felix, could give his personal testimony to his hope: “I have the same hope in God, . . . that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:15, NIV).

Hope takes account of such essential realities. God’s hope is based on salvation, justice, judgment, vindication, and completion. Such hope keeps us going, with our faces looking upward, ready to welcome the hoped-for One and to enter into God’s eternal kingdom.

THE PERSONAL HOPE

Let us return to the goldfinch’s song in the middle of a win-

ter snowstorm. For me at least, the song we shall sing of victory when hope is completed, the promise realized, and joy fulfilled, will have the same elements of melody that made my own heart sing that winter morning.

Like the bird, we live in a time of winter desolation, longing for summer. Just as the bird singing in the snow, we share our joy of our hope even when the situation seems hopeless. Because we know that our hope will be fulfilled, we will always be able to sing.

As Emily Dickinson wrote:

“‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers—

That perches in the soul—

And sings the tune without the words—

And never stops—at all.”

Or in the words of Shakespeare: “True hope is swift, and flies with swallow’s wings.”

May it truly be soon, our Lord, and may our true personal hope in You be fulfilled swiftly.

Hope and the Position of Suspense

HOPE AND WAITING

As I write this I am staying near Geneva, Switzerland. My nephew Imanuel is due to arrive from Frankfurt, Germany. We have planned this meeting. Knowing that he is coming and trusting his promises, I have a definite hope of seeing him soon.

But I don't know exactly when.

He knows where I will be and expects me to be here. So I wait, trying to be patient. But it is not the easiest of situations. What if I want to go somewhere else, even for a short while? He may come while I'm gone and not find me. I wouldn't want that. So I keep an eye out the window to see if he approaches. At the same time I keep on working (on this!) and look forward to seeing him arrive.

Yet it is a "position of suspense." Activities other than "occupying till he comes" (see Luke 19:13) are not practicable or possible, for otherwise I might miss him. I find my mind wondering when he may appear. Soon, I hope, because it will be great to see him again, after so long. Waiting, I find, is not an activity I most enjoy. But it is an active waiting as I continue with what needs to be done, but always ready to drop whatever I might be doing and to meet him in happiness when he does get here.

Hope and the Position of Suspense

It is a small and imperfect image of the time in which we find ourselves, as we too wait for our hope to be realized, wait for the coming of our Lord and Friend.

Hope means keeping alert and ready whatever the time. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 25:13, NIV).

A LONG TIME COMING?

A sleek space rocket sits on its launch pad. After years of preparation scientists have all its mechanisms ready. All systems are go! In the control room the computers make their constant checks and tests, the controllers wait anxiously, and the clock on the wall shows the time remaining. With rhythmic precision a voice counts out the last seconds of time.

"T minus 30 and counting. We are go for launch. Automatic firing sequence initiated. T minus 20. Looking good. T minus 10 9 8 7 Main engine ignition 4 3 2 1 Zero. Lift off, we have lift off!"

And the gleaming silver arrow hurtles heavenward in a cloud of smoke and fire.

Soon we too will be traveling heavenward. Soon Jesus will return to take us home with Him. And soon the end will arrive.

But when exactly? comes the insistent question.

That's the \$64,000 question. We always want to know how much time we've got! It is human nature to want to plan ahead. As a result, we demand a definite date, because we just can't stand having to wait without knowing exactly when! So if Jesus is returning to our planet, when is this dramatic event going to take place?

People all through history have tried to pinpoint the date of Jesus' return. And all have failed. Why? Because Jesus Himself said: "No one knows, however, when that day and hour will come—neither the angels in heaven nor the Son; the Father

alone knows” (Matt. 24:36, TEV).

No one will be able to work it out by mathematics or with computers. It’s something we cannot know. In fact, Jesus went on to say: “You do not know what day your Lord will come” (verse 42, TEV) and “the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him” (verse 44, TEV).

The problem, though, is that we always want to know when. We want to determine the time, not so much so that we can be ready, but so we can concentrate on the fulfillment of our hope when and only when we really need to!

God knows our fallible humanity only too well, which is why He does not give us a specific date. In the words of Augustine: “The last day is hidden so that every day may be regarded.”

But in our waiting, it may seem that the realization of our hope is a long time coming. Living in suspense is not easy as we constantly wonder, “When?” That is why Jesus told a story to illustrate what should be our response. “The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep” (Matt. 25:5, NIV).

As we study His parable, we should remember that it immediately follows Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question about the signs of the end. So when we read Matthew 25, we need to understand what Christ’s illustrations describe. Jesus is speaking about the hope of the Second Coming—and our relationship to this dramatic and conclusive event. He had just finished explaining all about His return. But like most of us, the disciples needed some help understanding what He meant. So Jesus illustrated His explanation with a parable.

We should look carefully at this picture of the Second Coming. In doing so, we must try to imagine that we are in that very situation. Think of what it means to us. Work out in our minds what Jesus was attempting to say.

We find 10 young women categorized into two classifica-

tions. “Five of them were foolish and five were wise” (verse 2, NIV). The emphasis here involves separation and preparation. All were waiting—in fact, all fell asleep—but they had different attitudes and levels of preparedness. They all went through the waiting time, becoming weary and tired. But the wise were ultimately ready—they held on to their hope, symbolized by their keeping a supply of oil on hand.

The wise were ready to act on the fulfillment of their hope. When the bridegroom arrived, they were prepared despite the passing of time.

THE CRY AT MIDNIGHT

Finally the announcement of the bridegroom rings forth. Hope is fulfilled. “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” (verse 6, NIV).

They have no more time for preparation. No more time for hope—for the object of hope is here!

The midnight cry is the announcement of the fulfillment of hope. All that they have anticipated is now completed in the arrival of the bridegroom. The anxieties along the way, the troubles of life, all the concerns, find themselves swept away in the glorious arrival of the King of kings and Lord of lords. The time of waiting has ended, the position of suspense over.

Our preparation time is now. This is why time continues: so that those who choose may get ready—now! Then “there will be the shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet, and the Lord himself shall come down from heaven” (1 Thess. 4:16, TEV).

All the women woke up. But the difference between them now becomes obvious. While they all waited in hope, five had done something about their hope—they had prepared. The five foolish women had been waiting, but they had not done anything about their hope. “The ten young women woke up and

trimmed their lamps. Then the foolish ones said to the wise ones, 'Let us have some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.' 'No, indeed,' the wise ones answered, 'there is not enough for you and us. Go to the shop and buy some for yourselves.' So the foolish ones went off to buy some oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom arrived" (Matt. 25:7-10, TEV).

The result of being ready is plain for all to see: "The five who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast" (verse 10, TEV).

That's the reward—just being there! Being with Jesus is the prize—not the streets of gold or the pearly gates. Commencing an eternity in the presence of our gracious God—that is the glorious objective of our blessed hope.

Once the bridegroom arrives, hope is fulfilled and the door of opportunity closes. "And the door was shut. Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you'" (verses 10-12, NIV).

Somehow his statement sounds harsh. But we should more likely read the reply of the bridegroom as a voice tinged with sadness and regret. Clearly the foolish women had made no preparation, and did not really know the person they were waiting for. The response from the bridegroom is a factual comment: there was no relationship.

Once the door of hope closes, hope ends. To be excluded from eternity because of lack of readiness to be with our Lord is a tragedy. In response we should look far more seriously at how we use our time and our talents. Readiness is not in making sure we legalistically obey requirements, but in developing a saving relationship with the God of hope.

THEREFORE KEEP WATCH

As Jesus concludes His illustration of how to live in the time-between, in the position of suspense, He urges: "Therefore

keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (verse 13, NIV).

Watch! That's the key. Again and again in Jesus' words on hope and preparation He emphasizes the need to watch.

So as we think of ourselves and our relationship to Jesus and His return, what is our attitude going to be? What is the basic motivation in our lives? Are we concerned about ourselves and making sure we do plenty of good things so we'll get a good reward? Or are we simply living as close to God as possible so that He can transform us, and then when He comes we will be surprised at the commendation we'll receive?

In His parable Jesus wasn't so concerned to establish the doctrine of the Second Advent as to answer the important question: How do I relate to such a hope?

"Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming—it might be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or at sunrise. If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep. What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:35-37, TEV).

As a teenager, I was returning from a long trip away from home. Some kind person had given me a ride, and I felt obliged to sit up front and make conversation. But I was so terribly tired that I just could not keep my eyes open. Whatever I did, I just could not keep watch. My eyelids kept closing. Although I bit my lip and pinched myself, I just could not stay awake.

Right then I recognized the situation of the disciples in Gethsemane. Jesus had asked His closest friends to do one thing for Him—to stay awake with Him, to keep watch. And they failed Him in His hour of greatest need.

For all our sakes, we need to stay awake to what is happening around us, to hold on to our living hope, to keep watch.

God says to each of us:

“Choose for yourselves *this day* whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

“*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 3:15, NIV).

“*Now* he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30, NIV).

“*Now* is the time of God’s favor, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2, NIV).

This is the reason Jesus wants to tell us about His soon coming—so that we can be ready. Not at some time in the future, but now—which is all the time we really have.

The vital question is not “when?” What does matter is what we’re doing about Jesus’ promise *right now*. For when the trumpet sounds and the lightning flashes and the voice of God rings out, nobody will be worrying about the timing. All that will matter is whether we have followed Jesus’ advice: Be ready! Watch and pray! Be on your guard! We measure our lives not in seconds and minutes, hours or days, months or years, but in heartbeats.

So as we watch in hope, let us make sure that hope fills our lives, and that hope prepares us for our meeting with our loving Lord. As Shakespeare says: “Journeys end in lovers meeting.”

May we all be there with the One we love the most at hope’s journey’s end.

WATCHING IN HOPE OR FOLLOWING FATAL HOPES?

We need to have the true hope and not follow foolish and false ones. Most of all, we must watch in hope.

On October 22, 1707, an admiral of the English fleet by the unlikely name of Sir Cloudesley Shovell had a decision to make.

He was returning from a successful campaign fighting the French, and his flagship, the *Association*, together with others in

his 21-strong fleet, bulged with captured treasure. But bad weather had made the trip north a difficult one. Not having seen the sun for days, they were navigating by dead reckoning. Shovell and the other captains believed they were off the coast of Ushant at the mouth of the English Channel. The course home lay northeast, they believed.

Or at least so they hoped.

The only dissenting voice was a man identified in some accounts as a pilot from the Isles of Scilly. He told the admiral and his advisers that they were wrong, and that the planned course would shipwreck them on his home islands.

But the commanders ignored him, and the fleet continued in the direction they hoped was right. It was a vain hope. An uninformed hope. And, eventually, a fatal hope.

For the pilot was right. Their dead-reckoning calculations were wrong. The charts on which they placed their trust were also wrong, placing the islands in the wrong spot. Disregarding the one man who did know where they were was the last wrong step on their way to disaster.

Sir Cloudesley sent three ships on ahead. They soon found they were way off their expected course and in great danger among the rocks of the Scilly Isles. Two made their way through, but a rock holed the *Phoenix*, and its crew had to beach it.

Going ahead in their hope—their blind faith in their rightness—during a gale, more ships sailed full speed into the treacherous western rocks of the Scillies, with a total loss of five vessels, including the *Association* herself. Sir Cloudesley also paid the price for his mistaken hope—he too perished during the wreck. Nearly 2,000 men died with him as the ships *Eagle*, *Romney*, and *Firebrand* faithfully followed the *Association* despite the firing of warning signal guns. Jagged rocks tore them to pieces.

It was a tragic lesson in how misguided hope turns deadly and shows how events can expose a false basis for hope as worthless. Clearly it is dangerous for a fleet to go on in poor visibility and at night. Most of all, we wonder why they did not listen to the one who knew, who advised a different course.

The English fleet followed a worthless hope that parallels the kinds of decisions we may also make. We may believe we are in the right place, that we can work out where we're going, and that we know the way ahead. But all too often we're wrong. Thinking we can trust our own hopes based on our own calculations, we plow right on, just like *H.M.S. Association*—straight into the rocks of Scilly's Gilstone Ledges, and make a shipwreck of our faith, our hopes, and our lives.

Watch in hope!

*Too Busy Occupying?
On Making Hope Relevant*

THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US

"The world is too much with us," wrote William Wordsworth. "Late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

The world truly invades our lives and our minds to the extent that we are preoccupied with occupying—so busy living our lives that we have no time for anything else. So busy that we forget what it is all for—what to live means, and why hope is so vital and relevant.

Entering a small village shop in England one time, I found the shopkeeper in conversation with a local friend. As I waited I immediately became struck by their conversation. It went something like this:

"How's the job, then, John?" the shopkeeper asked.

"Really dull and boring. What's the point of it all, anyway? Seventy years and that's it. Makes you sick, doesn't it, Andy?"

"Well, at least you're not working down at the poultry farm, John. Mean to say, you have it easy. So what if we all snuff it? We've all got to go sometime. Just enjoy life, take what you can, and have fun—that's my motto."

"I dunno, Andy. Must be more to it than that."

Deep down, people see that they're missing out on something. Too often life is just vanity, a "chasing after the wind." So what can they do about it?

If I were to characterize the way that people live I'd say that they're trying to find happiness. All the world wants to be happy, to get happy, to stay happy. "Come on, get happy" goes the song. Of course, people try different ways to find happiness, but in the end all that we do is dedicated to making ourselves happy. But what really works? Everyone has ideas, but so many are false. Where do we find true happiness? When earthly pleasures fade, what are we left with?

I had a friend who was once a Christian. He was also, I believe, very happy. At the time he had a simple job and made enough to live on. Then he went into business, doing first one thing and then the next until eventually he was a millionaire with a large number of profitable companies under his control. He was able to indulge himself and his family, buying expensive cars—later, even a helicopter. Purchasing an even larger place to live way out in the country, he lived an expensive and pleasure-filled life. But he was no longer a Christian. And from what he said to me once, I just wonder how happy he was.

For all the wealth of the world cannot compare to the joy of knowing we are right with God. Money, possessions, and ambitions have their place. But when they lead you away from God, then they can become terrible curses. My former friend's marriage broke up and he lost all his fortune in bad business deals. Today he lives alone—and has no hope.

I had another clever friend whom I worked with in the aerospace industry. The son of a clergyman, he entered space technology, and through his expertise he rapidly rose up the ladder of success. Soon he was project manager, works manager, and then general manager. By all appearances he had a most successful career, yet he was an unhappy man. He in-

creasingly drank. One day someone asked me to talk with him. At the end of a long conversation about very deep things—the meaning of life, the reason for being, hope, salvation, and all the rest—he said to me, "I wish I could have hope. I know you have hope, and I just wish I could have hope too."

JUST OCCUPYING

God clearly identifies the character of those preoccupied with occupying: "You say, 'I am rich and well off; I have all I need.' But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked, and blind" (Rev. 3:17, TEV).

This clear rebuke should make us reconsider carefully what it is that we should be doing, what the really vital values are, and what is our true motivation. Here the Advent hope can help us by reordering our priorities and turning our vision away from all the busy things of this life back to eternal truths.

While Jesus in His parable did speak about occupying, it was occupying "till He comes" (see Luke 19:13). Sometimes it seems we are just occupying to no real purpose, thus losing sight of our objective. In all we do—in all that the church does—we must not be satisfied with working toward permanence here. Our future is with God, our home is with Him, and our values must be His. Instead of seeking a place in this world, let's remember that our goal is a city whose builder and maker is God, and that our citizenship is heaven (see Phil. 3:20).

It is important to analyze what we are doing and to see who we really are. We need to ask ourselves, "What is our primary motivation, what are our first priorities?" God reminds us that "I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other!" (Rev. 3:15, TEV).

Neither cold nor hot. What does God mean? As we look at the kind of people we are, the greatest challenge is to do *some-*

thing. The modern curse is not first of all mistaken theological views of one extreme or another, nor of misguided programs or interpretations or positions. Rather it is that so few really seem to care at all. Apathy is the spiritual nerve gas that paralyzes the church, preventing it from achieving God's goals. That is why it offends Him so much, and He would prefer any other temperature than lukewarmness!

The double tragedy is that so many fail to see their situation. We need to include ourselves here, and not use the passage to point accusatory fingers at others. The general condition of the church, God declares, is one of widespread apathy, of a failure to see our spiritual condition. "But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth!" (verse 16, TEV).

Like tasteless food that is all of one tepid temperature, God rejects our own self-centered deeds. And like soup that has cooled down, or ice cream that has warmed up, our apathetic deeds are an offense to a God who wants to come and fulfill the promises of the Advent hope.

HOPE FOR THE "WRETCHED 'RICH'"

As we occupy ourselves, all too often it is just that. We are just occupying ourselves. The tragedy is that we value that which does not truly satisfy—we run after the treasures of this world and of the passing moment.

God tells us we are not really rich, even though we may believe ourselves to be. Jesus concluded His parable of the rich fool in the same way: "This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God's sight" (Luke 12:21, TEV).

"Not rich in God's sight!" is a tragic epitaph for those who believed themselves to be very rich. What about ourselves? Don't we need to reconsider what we are doing and why? We

may think we are rich, but God tells us something different.

Here again our focus on hope can help. It reminds us not to become too involved in the affairs of this world. We are not to be self-focused either. Our hope-focus points to the true values God desires, and it gives us motivation to share the faith we have with others. Our riches come not from what we have achieved for ourselves, but in sharing of God's gracious gifts.

That is why God counsels us to "buy" from Him—not that we have anything "worth" the trade: "I advise you, then, to buy gold from me, pure gold, in order to be rich. But also white clothing to dress yourself and cover up your shameful nakedness. But also some ointment to put on your eyes, so that you may see" (Rev. 3:18, TEV).

Such gold is not wealth or material benefit but rather faith refined in the fire. It is true gold that lasts, not the fool's gold that will perish at the end.

The white clothes are those that God provides, such as the wedding garments in Jesus' parable (see Matt. 22:1-14). Our righteousness is as filthy rags, and God wants to take it from us and clothe us in His garments.

The eye ointment heals the blindness of sin, enabling us to truly see—see spiritually, see the truth. The god of this world blinds us from seeing the truth about God (see 2 Cor. 4:4), and we most of all need this spiritual sight to see reality for what it truly is.

God tells us to buy these essential qualities "without money and without cost":

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare" (Isa. 55:1, 2, NIV).

Without money and without cost—we have no currency to buy anything from God anyway. Nor can we trade with Him for the things He offers. We only “buy” by making a commitment, by demonstrating that we are giving ourselves.

Where does hope come into all of this? Again it is the motivator for action. Because we hope, we recognize our needs. We could identify the gold of hope, the white clothes of hope, and the eyesalve of hope—for hope gives us this spiritual richness, this spiritual clothing, and this spiritual sight.

JESUS THE DOOR OF HOPE

Jesus tells us that hope is here, because He is right outside the door: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20, NIV).

When Jesus spoke about His coming, He said the same thing:

“And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door” (Matt. 24:31-33, NIV).

Right at the door—that’s how close Jesus and His hope really is. Instead of ignoring the divine visitor who knocks at the door, saying we’re too busy to answer, we need to run and open up the door!

Our response as we recognize that we have become too self-absorbed, too busy with all our occupying, must be a rush to unlatch the door to our loving Lord of hope. In the same way that we would run to fling open the door to someone we love, we will want to open the door to God and let Him enter. His offer is not to come in and rearrange the furniture, or to evict

us, but to sit down and eat with us. In the same way as we share with others over a meal, God wants to talk with us, to be our truest friend. What an incredible offer from the God of hope!

Trouble is, we often see the Advent hope as interfering in what we want to do, as something disrupting our lives. We may even be self-satisfied and see no reason to change. Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we need to look again and understand what is truly valuable and important, what has real meaning and purpose.

When Jesus explained the values of His kingdom, the way He turned their value systems upside down, He shocked His listeners.

In Matthew 5 Jesus delivered His sermon on the mount. During it Jesus reversed the perceived wisdom of His time. That is how the Advent hope also affects us—for it points to a different goal and emphasizes a different attitude to life.

HOPE IS A MIRROR

Jesus turns our value systems around—what the world sees as important God’s kingdom reverses. Priorities get inverted and “reality” becomes back-to-front. In this “mirrorland” we recognize that what we may think is important should be reversed, perhaps even turned upside down!

Jesus spoke of those who are blessed. They are blessed (happy) . . . because God will reverse their present state. His sermon reveals the world as a mirror image—backwards—of the true nature of God’s kingdom.

Think of Jesus’ other “reversal” sayings: The first shall be last, the last first. The proud abased, the humble exalted. Those who seek to save their lives will lose them, while those who lose their lives will save them. Again and again Jesus gives a perspective that is the opposite of popular views, especially in the realm of religion. He shows that popularity—achievement in the world’s eyes—is not significant in His kingdom, for exam-

ple, the story of the Pharisee and the publican. In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus portrays an “enemy” as being the true friend, the one who follows the values of God’s kingdom. Jesus is at odds with the way the world views things. “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus frequently uses the phrase “you have heard it said, but I say to you” to extend and expand on previous commands, demonstrating the real meaning behind them. He calls on us to “seek first the kingdom of God.” We are to get our priorities straight according to the divine mirrorland.

And in His call for hope in His return, He makes His values and priorities clear. We are to follow His way, His commands, and His kingdom. Hope is a mirror that shows us who we are and where we’re going. The arrival of Jesus fulfills this hope, and His kingdom of glory will reflect all that He came to live and die for.

The world remains “too much with us.” But the mirror of hope reflects us to ourselves, helping us to see who we really are and what is truly important.

So what do you see in hope’s mirror? While we are to stay occupied with the work we have to do, this must never blind us to the centrality of our hope, our present and future perspective.

The tragic words of the English poet Thomas Hardy in “In Tenebris” reveal a life without hope, an existence that is futile and meaningless:

“One who, past doubtings all,
Waits in unhope.”

Waiting in unhope? Is that us? Has our hope turned into unhope?

No, God calls us to leave our busyness and preoccupation with things of this world and to make sure that in all we do we maintain our perspective.

For in this, as in all things, we are to be “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). Both now in the present and in the future for all eternity.

Dealing With the Delay of Hope

THE TROUBLE WITH THE FUTURE

The problem with hope in the future is that the present overwhelms us. We just can't seem to see beyond what we already know. So to think of what the future may hold troubles us.

When the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989, who knew what would happen next? Many pundits made predictions. But on the tenth anniversary of that momentous event, a journalist looked back to see who had been right about what would happen after the Wall collapsed. He discovered that no one had had it right. No one predicted the rapid collapse of European Communism and the demise of the Soviet Union.

Instead they made predictions that were way off base.

The end of Communism will be a long time coming. Wrong. If the Warsaw Pact goes, so does NATO. Wrong. Germany will not be allowed to reunite. Wrong. A united Germany will become a nuclear power before the end of the millennium. Wrong. Gorbachev will long continue in power. Wrong.

In terms of foretelling the future, even over the brief time span of 10 years, the experts could not get it right. Why not? Because "the problem with trying to see the future is the present. What we know usually overpowers our ability to see what

Dealing With the Delay of Hope

might be coming. What is, is; it has the advantage of tangible existence. This makes the present hard to shake, no matter how smart you are" (Robert G. Kaiser of the Washington Post service in *International Herald Tribune*, Nov. 10, 1999).

Does what we *know* overpower our ability to see what's coming? Is the present hard to shake? Most of all, what about the *timing* of the future?

We may think we have the answers. But the present can fool us too, unless we're open to the thought that it is not the dominant factor. That's why we may see a delay in our hope. Because we so strongly want our hope to be fulfilled and time goes on, we begin to wonder if the promise is being deferred.

Christians have been waiting in hope for almost two millennia. Questions disturb us: "Are we right to go on preaching such a message? Have the passing years given the lie to Christ's promise? Is it time to give up and to forget about any return of the Messiah?"

WHERE IS THE HOPED-FOR PROMISE?

To not doubt hope is a very real challenge for the church. While many would not want to put doubting thoughts into words, the questions are insistent as the shadows of pessimism lengthen and doubt invades the church. Read the following and see if it does not fit an attitude that you have heard yourself, or may even echo thoughts you may have had:

"Where is the promised return of the Savior who can put an end to all this? Why does time continue on? When will Jesus come? The Christian church has been waiting for almost two millennia. Were the early Christians right in affirming the soon coming? Were the Adventist 'pioneers' mistaken? Are we right to go on preaching such a message? Is it not time to give up, to forget about hope?"

This is the situation Peter answers:

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:3, 4, NIV).

While scoffing certainly differs from genuine doubt, the question is the same: “Where is this ‘coming’ He promised?”

The Bible’s answer is one that points to God’s compassion and “long-suffering” nature. He certainly is not reluctant to return—in fact, He is eager to do so. But His advent also brings the tragedy of the loss of those who have not accepted Him, and He seeks to lead everyone that He can to repentance: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (verse 9, NIV).

IS THERE A DELAY?

“Delay” is an unfortunate word. It suggests mistake and imperfection. We see delays caused by unexpected situations, breakdowns, or technical problems. As human beings we delay because we do not wish to be on time to do whatever we would prefer to avoid. But is this a useful term to describe the way some view the timing of the Second Coming?

Can we really term God’s actions as delayed? If He is eternal and outside of time, how can He “delay”? How can one who knows the end from the beginning “postpone” His plans? What of God’s all-knowing aspect?

It is from our perspective that we speak of the concept of delay. The trouble lies with us, with our finite understanding. We may think that Christ’s return should have occurred before now. As human beings we see 2,000 years between the giving of the promise and our own time.

Christ made the gospel to the world (see Mark 13:10) a nec-

essary precondition for the Advent. Through 2 Peter 3 we witness God’s desire to save all humanity. Various earthly events and situations must precede the coming of the Son of man. The emergence of the antichrist, the climax of the attack against God (2 Thess. 2), and the filling of the cup of iniquity (see Rev. 17:4; 18:6) form part of the “time” that must first reach its fullness. However, we cannot take the world’s condition as the primary reason for the delay. God is not waiting for total destruction before He saves His people. He is still in control of our planet. His angels hold back the winds of strife. The Lord is not sitting idly by, waiting for sin to multiply in its own time.

Two divine principles operate here: God’s unchanging purpose, and His patience. The first involves His sovereign will and purpose that expresses itself in the certainty of Christ’s second coming: “I will come again.” To the all-knowing God, the time is also known (see Matt. 24: 36). In the same way as the Flood came (note verse 37), as the Israelites entered the Promised Land, as Christ appeared on the first occasion in “the fullness of time,” so He will return again at His specific time (1 Tim. 6:14, 15; see also Luke 17:24, 30). God is in no way subject to or dependent on humanity in His fundamental decisions. The Second Advent will happen, and “will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). In terms of God’s absolute power and authority, Christ’s second coming is an unconditional event. The promise has been made in divine omnipotence. He cannot fail, He cannot change, and He cannot “delay.”

The other principle relates to God’s patience—His mercy and “long-suffering” nature. This perspective sees God as allowing further time so that people may accept His promises and enter into a covenant relation with Him based on love. God is ultimately patient, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

The continuation of time is for our benefit. Yet we cannot

make God's compassion an excuse that allows sin, pain, and death to continue forever. The end must come, because permitting eternal evil is not the action of a loving God. Despite all this talk of delay, we must remember that it was the wicked servant who began saying "My Lord delays his coming"!

HOPE DEFERRED

Yet despite all this, we may still feel that our hope is being deferred. In the words of Proverbs: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12, NIV).

It's a natural reaction. Waiting, as we have seen before, is not the most comfortable of times. We find ourselves in between the promise and its fulfillment, and as time continues, we feel that it is not happening as fast as we want. Like Daniel, who saw the vision taking a long time, we feel exhausted and fall ill (see Dan. 8:27).

Unlike the case with Daniel, God does not inform us about the time for the fulfillment of our hope. But when we become discouraged, we need to remember that "hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

In the end, those saved out of the world are "they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:23), the wheat ripened by God through the latter rain (Matt. 3:12; Matt. 13:30; James 5:7). God will gather His people, those with whom He has a special relationship (see 1 Peter 2:9), those who have trusted only in the divine demonstration and provision of Jesus and the Lord's promises.

The Lord provides the answer, the means, and the methods. We respond and act accordingly. God never told His people to calculate the time of the Advent, to concern themselves with whether all the preconditions had been met, or to worry about explaining the delay. All He asked them to do was to "Watch!"

to "Be ready!" and to "Look up!" Redemption is drawing near, and is nearer than when we first believed (Luke 21:28; Rom. 13:11).

It is going to happen. Doubt in the time can lead to doubt in the event. But no, says Peter, it is absolutely certain. The Lord will come. And as a result we should be looking forward to that new heaven and new earth, "*the home of righteousness*" (2 Peter 3:13, NIV).

The challenge is not to see hope as something being deferred. The goal is to keep hope very much alive, and not to tie it in our minds to time limits. As the verse in Proverbs concludes: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Prov. 13:12, NIV).

We need to continue to look forward to hope's fulfillment, thus allowing God's tree of life to heal our heart-sickness.

PATIENCE MEANS SALVATION

As we wait for hope's fulfillment, we must "bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation" (2 Peter 3:15, NIV). Consequently, "hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5, NIV).

Impatience and over-expectation can lead us to speculate that the Second Coming is "not more than a few years away." Others may see just about any development as some sign of the times. This can set people up for terrible disappointment and discouragement.

It's interesting to see the various kinds of things people have considered as "signs" of the times.

One book on prophecy from the early 1900s regarded the development of rapid steam train transportation as fulfilling the prediction that "many shall rush to and fro." Under a picture of two early biplanes appeared the caption "the nations'

airy navies”—again seen as an amazing development that “proved” the end was near.

Other past “signs” have included telegraphy, the “wireless” radio, the automobile, the typewriter, and the movies.

Yet the truth is that to “read your newspaper as dating the end” (as one person once advised) can lead to false assumptions and expectations. Not *everything* is a sign of the times.

For example, people often cite wars and military conflicts as evidence for the approaching end. But in Matthew 24 Jesus takes great pains to point out that though there may be wars and rumors of wars, *the end is not yet*. It is instructive to go through this “signs” chapter and realize how many events that we normally interpret as signs Jesus clearly excluded as such.

A quick check of the Internet shows predictions of the end of the world for nearly every day for the next few years, based on Mayan legends or measurements of the pyramids or mystic visions from extraterrestrials. The trouble with such false prophets—and any form of date-setting—is that they bring the whole future perspective into disrepute.

Some equate urging that “Jesus will be here in just a very few short years” to preaching fire and brimstone. The “selfish” desire to avoid the negative aspects of the judgment they regard as the equivalent of taking out “fire insurance.”

We need to ask ourselves, What is most important here? Is it the time of the Advent, or the certainty of the Advent? Is it our message to preach dates in the immediate future (whether we give exact dates, or simply say within x years), or to preach the “sure and certain” hope that is fulfilled in the return of “this same Jesus”?

At a ministerial meeting one pastor expressed his disappointed feelings. “Here I am, on the verge of retirement,” he told his fellow ministers. “I have been preaching the Advent message for more than 40 years. I argued with the brethren

about the need for going to college before entering the ministry, because I believed I would not have time to complete the course before Jesus returned. Now I am old—and disappointed. Why hasn’t Jesus come?”

WAITING ON THE LORD

If we are preaching a “within x years” doctrine, disappointment will be inevitable this side of the coming. Such an approach focuses on the timing, not on the meaning and purpose of the event. It speaks to our human nature, which wants to prepare for a specific event at a specific time. The unspecified time of the Advent thus leaves us unsettled.

But Jesus says, “Be ready. Always!” Not in the sense of trying to make ourselves fit for translation, but having such a relationship with our loving Lord that we can happily meet Him whenever He shows up. “Journeys end in lovers meeting,” Shakespeare observed, and if we truly love Jesus, then His arrival will not be a dreaded event or an intrusion into our lives, but the day when our best Friend returns.

We don’t need to date the Advent, but we do need to know “this same Jesus” now! His return is “the blessed hope” only if He is blessed to us in the patient present. That means despite our realization of all our faults and failings, we can still pray with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20) and mean it today and every day until He appears in the sky.

“For I am bound with fleshly bands,
Joy, beauty, lie beyond my scope;
I strain my heart, I stretch my hands,
And catch at hope.”

—Christina Rossetti, “De Profundis”

Despite the world thinking us foolish, we catch at hope. We hold on to the blessedness of hope, knowing that we will not be disappointed in the end. While times of patience can be trying,

we can have confidence in the God who promises. Each of us must learn to “wait on the Lord” in all things, and let the Lord work it all out in His good time: “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord” (Ps. 27:14, NIV).

“We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield” (Ps. 33:20, NIV).

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope” (Ps. 130:5, NIV).

Called to One Hope

SAILING HOME—TOGETHER

The two teenage boys who escort me down to the waiting boat seem excited. We’re on our way to a rendezvous offshore. The plan is to meet our friend who skippers a fishing boat, and for me to see for myself the evening seabird spectacle.

Erik, Steinthor, and I launch the inflatable boat from the tiny rocky cove that passes for a harbor and head straight out to sea. We sail out in hope.

I inquire cautiously as to how they know where to meet the fishing boat, and how they know the way. After all, the ocean has no signposts.

“Oh, we know where to meet him, and we know the way,” Erik responds confidently. Out we go.

Now, I’m not the best boat passenger at the best of times, and the waves we’re headed into look threatening to me.

We crash into the first big roller. Sitting in the stern of the inflatable, I fly up in the air and then drop down heavily on the plank of wood that passes for a seat.

The two young men laugh gleefully, and then quickly stop themselves as they decide it would be inappropriate to enjoy a guest’s discomfort.

Next wave. *Crash*. Again. And again. My rear complains as I reconcile myself to a painful trip. Trying to brace my arms

against the plank to reduce the impact, I smile thinly at the boys. They grin back.

“How far?” I inquire.

“Not far,” Erik responds.

On reflection I should have asked, “How long?” I’m petrified that this little rubber craft will flip over any moment and we all will drown.

Crash. Crash. Crash.

Painfully and slowly we make our way out into the unknown, leaving comfort and security behind us. I think mournfully of soft beds and warm homes.

“So, do you usually venture out when it’s this rough?” Just making conversation.

The boys grin again. “No; normally we’d never go out with waves this rough, but we didn’t want to disappoint you, so we decided to go anyway.”

Great! So now I’m the one to blame. I watch the waves and feel the wind blow hard against my face. Sensing my faith shrinking, I want to call out, “Lord, save me!”

I really believe I’m about to drown. How foolish this journey! Do I really think I can make it? Do I think I’m superhuman? Do I think I can walk on water?

Somehow it seemed like a parable of life itself—surrounded by huge waves of death, sitting painfully in a tiny boat, trying to make headway, and getting nowhere.

I can tell my friends are as worried as I am, though they keep their grins in place. No chance of turning back—the waves will swamp us immediately if we turn broadside to them.

“Lord, save us!” my mind shouts out of desperation.

The next wave crashes by.

Then, suddenly—nothing. I’m bracing for the next one, but . . .

Flat calm! When I look around I find no wind, no waves.

What happened? Where did the storm go?

We stare in stunned amazement, sitting in a little boat that is just gently rocking on the light swell, for all the world as if we were crossing the Sea of Galilee.

Eventually we move on, slicing through the still water, to meet our friend.

There, in the dramatic golden glow of the midnight sun low in the horizon, I watch entranced as shearwaters glide past and auks flutter close by while gulls mew and terns chatter. All around us wheel gannets, their white plumage gleaming golden in the unearthly light. Again and again they plunge into the sea, sending spray showering and glittering in fountains upon fountains. In the feeding melee wings touch wings in a swirling snowstorm of feathers, as if the hosts of heaven danced above my head.

All too soon I forced myself to drag my eyes away from the scene.

“We have to go,” Steinthor says, pleased with my delight. Glancing back, I watch the birds still swirling and gliding above the sea as we sail home in a white cloud of spray over a sea like glass, journey almost done.

Through the voyage we’ve seen the waves at their roughest. Yet we’ve also witnessed the power of the One whom even the winds and waves obey. Catching a glimpse of heaven even in the brokenness of earth, we’re homeward bound. For a better Friend, always there but seldom looked for, travels with us on the way.

THE HOPE THAT MAKES US ONE

Our shared hope makes us one—one in the blessed hope. All of us in the same boat, we hold on to the same hope, “the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2, NIV).

Even our physical and spiritual unity is linked to our one hope: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called" (Eph. 4:4, NIV).

It is far more than an attitude of hopeful expectancy, because we actually are *called* to *one* hope. Note both those words. We are *called*. God summons us as a people to hope. It is our special responsibility to which we have been formed. And if we fail to maintain such hope, then we fail in our God-given responsibility.

Our focus must remain clear: Our hope is in God and in His promised salvation. Specifically, we must center our hope on the arrival of the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There can be no other hope for us. It is also one hope in the sense it is the hope that makes us one—uniting us in a common experience.

THE UNITY OF GOD

The one hope comes from the one God: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (verses 5, 6, NIV).

It is hardly surprising that such hope should be unifying, since it has its origin in the God who is one, who seeks to make us one: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor. 8:6, NIV).

This is the same oneness for which Jesus prayed for His disciples—and all who would follow later. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in

them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:20-23, NIV).

It is the unity to which God calls us, in the same way as He summons us to the one hope. In fact, they are aspects of one and the same belief and hope. "We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10, NIV).

THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

"Where there is no hope, there is no faith" (William Gouge).

Without hope we cannot identify ourselves as a community of faith. We have to have hope "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13, NIV).

By avoiding the extremes of speculation and by remaining totally committed to the Word of God we become united. As we demonstrate love for one another, recognizing the grace of God to each of us, then we grow together in oneness. Each of us should remember that Jesus' test for discipleship was that others would see that we love one another. Problems come when we want to enforce our own ideas and promote ourselves.

Such unity of the faith does not come about by accident. It requires that we make our hope and faith a priority and actively work to bring each other together.

A WORTHY LIFE

As a result, God wants our lives to reflect our calling, our hope. Paul declared: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (verses 1, 2, NIV).

An unexamined life is a waste. So in leading up to his statement on the unity of the one hope, the apostle urges us to look at our lives and make sure they are “worthy of the calling.”

One dominant form of hope motivates those who play the lottery. People dream that by matching numbers they will make themselves rich. But it is a vain hope, based on the premise of a very few getting rich at the expense of everyone else. Still it is a hope that many cling to.

Yet even the winners seem to find such a hope meaningless. How many times do you read of lottery winners losing everything, of being worse off than before? Family dispute, divorce, even death destroys everything. It is certainly not a hope that makes us one—rather the opposite.

One man spent his millions within months and went bankrupt. A woman winner now hides in her apartment, too afraid to go out. One family of winners are no longer speaking to each other, and two of them have become alcoholics.

God does not call us to judge others and their worthiness. Yet it is clear from our own personal experience that we are all deficient in some way. We need to grow in God’s grace and hope as we become more like the Lord and His matchless character. Notice, however, what Scripture spells out as being a life worthy of the calling: one completely humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with others in love. Sometimes we have the idea that God summons us to some staggering task or overwhelming achievement. On the contrary, what God is looking for is on the inside, attitudes that reflect the way we treat one another. Only then can He invite us to the work He wishes us to do.

The source of our strength is God and His hope: “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:30, 31, NIV).

Hoping in the Lord is our source of spiritual strength. Such hope means renewal, a reinvigorating supply of spiritual energy. Soaring like eagles, running without becoming tired, walking and not being exhausted: we are spiritually recharged by hoping in the Lord.

OUR WITNESS: HELPING OTHERS HOPE

In our hope we find ourselves observed by the whole world. As Paul put it, “It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men” (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV).

We are God’s exhibition to the universe. The whole cosmos sees the witness we make to the Advent hope as we demonstrate our complete confidence in the God of promise.

In our Christian lives we can put into living reality the words of the proverb: “If fortune torments me, hope contents me.” Why? Because we know the “good hope”: “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (2 Thess. 2:16, 17, NIV).

HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

“. . . and they all lived happily ever after.”

The best stories finish with a final statement of comfort and satisfaction, the necessary conclusion to the tale.

But think again.

Happily ever after?

What in this world is ever “happily ever after”? To think that such a thing is possible in this life is an illusion. Situations change, accidents happen, people die. The neat ending is unreal, and is why the truth differs so greatly from fiction.

Now, I do not want to be a killjoy or to throw a bucket of cold water over such positive dreams, but maybe we end up believing such stories too much.

People look for the illusory happily-ever-after where it doesn't exist. They become offended when life doesn't work out as they fantasize. Sometimes they may even try to deny reality to preserve their illusion.

The people of this world watch the movies, read the romances, hear the songs—and, despite themselves, still believe them. In between the “Once upon a time . . .” and the “. . . happily ever after” they exercise a willing suspension of disbelief. They become entranced with the thought that instead of the reality of pain, sadness, and eventual death, in some way heroism and love and virtue will conquer all.

Then, when reality crowds in, so do cynicism and bitterness. As the dream dies, so do hope and meaning and destiny. Life, if there is no happy ever after, seems to be a nothing, a joke, a pointless existence.

Either way, what is there? Is it just a choice between a mirage, however desirable, or the bleak desolation of meaninglessness?

On our own, that's all there is—foolish dreams or cynical nightmares.

But that's where God steps in. His appeal is not to illusion or to the rejection of meaning and purpose in this life. God is not in denial. Rather, based in the reality that He alone controls, He offers to create real meaning in life now.

How can you be sure? By choosing what He offers. Do you want a baseless promise as insubstantial as a nursery story? An empty nothingness that aches like a void? Or a life of real purpose and meaning?

Only with God can there be any security, any reality to such promises.

The odd thing is that God Himself tells the best “happily-

ever-after” story. It is more than a vain concluding flourish to a fictional story or a lame way of saying, “Hope things work out well.” God's story is far more incredible than any romantic novel or fantasy fiction or human daydream.

God promises Himself. And that's the guarantee. For this is absolute reality, ultimate truth. The opposite of fiction is the strange truth that the greatest happy ending of all comes as the free gift of God, the God of promise who does not lie.

From “In the beginning, God” to God of the end, the person of God is the proof positive of being happy ever after—only in God's eternal presence can we truly be.

Hope Blazes Bright!

ENDINGS

As I drive mile upon mile at day's end, the glory of sunset forces me to a stop.

I stare out across the vast flatness to the wide overspreading sky. In flaming fire the sun goes down, casting shadowed glows of intense gold and orange over red and purple. The winter fields, plowed and empty, remind me of similar fields in a place I called home for many years, now long gone.

With exaggerated slowness the light fades and the sky turns deeper purple, until the final rays of golden light vanish and the intense darkness of night overcomes the world. Like an inconsolable sadness, the end comes, and I fight it. With Dylan Thomas, I want to "rage against the dying of the light."

Why does everything always have to end? Days end. Lives end. Worlds end. Everything ends.

Suddenly I realize that I have stopped right beside a cemetery almost hidden in the vastness of the fields all around. A few grave markers break the skyline, shadowed monuments of death. The last resting place of those who farmed these empty fields, now dark and barren.

What of their hopes and dreams now? All their toil and labor under the sun? Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. Our little lives end with the deepest of all sleeps.

Hope Blazes Bright!

End. The finality of termination, the ceasing of life. The last breath, the inescapable close, the falling of the curtain. Like a heavy weight, the inevitability of where life leads burdens my every thought. How foolish we all are to live as if we are here forever. One day every last one of us breathes our last.

Endings are all we see, the eventual close of everything and everyone—of every thought and feeling and ambition. The recognition of that fact is as hard and empty as the fields around me.

Lifting up my eyes from the headstones and empty fields to the dark sky, I search for answers. Even the stars that shine so serenely, seemingly so permanent, will eventually burn themselves out. Nothing lasts forever. And all dissolves in the mistiness of my eyes.

In a world so full of endings and loss, of partings and death, the most valuable thing of all is the eternal. But here none exists. The day vanishes away, the light dies, life ebbs to a close. The cemetery disappears into the night, lost among the fields that stretch to the horizon, the grave markers the last to fade.

Nothing is left. Even the memories fade, the place once called home grows dim.

Then I notice a flash of brilliant light. For a brief moment a shooting star burns a bright trail in the sky overhead before it too vaporizes into dust. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes . . .

But I understand. In the sky a message written in a blaze of light declares: "Soon!"

Soon, and very soon, this world of endings, of life-wearing impermanence, will itself cease to be. But in its ending comes God's re-creation, His glorious new beginning of eternity. We will have a home, permanent and never-ending.

But most of all, we will have an everlasting life in the presence of the One without beginning and without end: God Himself.

Now I turn away, to drive on, hoping for the end. For in the

end comes God's eternal beginning.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

"Hope springs eternal"—but as we have seen, sometimes hope dies away, or is mistaken or disappointed. In trying to make their hope a solid reality, some have taken wrong roads, such as setting dates for the Lord's return or making false prophecies or misunderstanding the signs.

Praise God that our hope does not depend on us! It is God's hope that we trust, not ourselves with all our faults and failings. He alone is trustworthy, and He will deliver on His promise.

The early Christian believers spread the hope because it was their dearest joy. How is it with us? While none of us would put our hands up and say "I'm ready for heaven" and trust in our own works, we surely must be looking for our returning Savior, keenly awaiting His appearing.

The inmates interned in a World War II prison camp anxiously followed news reports. As it became clear that the war was coming to an end, they wondered what would happen to them. Would their guards kill them before they left? Would they be in the middle of a battle, caught in the cross fire? Would they be left to starve? What would happen?

They prayed and looked forward to freedom, despite their dangerous situation. Each of them lived by hope.

Suddenly, one day they looked up and saw paratroopers descending from the skies. Rescue! Liberation! Salvation from above!

HAPPY TO SEE HIM

Though none of us should arrogantly claim that we are ready to go to heaven, we should all be looking forward to being with Jesus. In the same way as we want to be together with the people we love here on this earth, we will eagerly await being to-

gether with the Lord of love.

What would it say about our relationship with those we claimed to love, if we tried to avoid meeting or at least delayed our appointment with them? Clearly we would be demonstrating that the loving relationship we claimed was not all we said it was.

That is why we need to be clear, here and now, about our relationship with our Savior. If we will not be happy to see Him whenever He chooses to return, then we have not made Him number one in our lives. But our response should be that we "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2), "rejoicing in hope" (Rom. 12:12, NKJV).

If somehow we feel uncomfortable with the idea of soon seeing Jesus, we must examine how we relate to Him. For example, if we regard Jesus as hostile, as being against us, then it is hard to love Him. Or if we cling to actions we know are wrong, then we feel guilty. But if we claim His promises, while still admitting our imperfections, we can truly look forward to His coming with hope and happiness.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

HOPING TO THE END!

"Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

Hope to the end. That's what our lives need to be filled with. We must never give up hope, never let its blaze go out. As life continues, it can be easy to lose that first love and that burning hope. Some have faltered, perhaps because they identified their hope too much with a specific time. But though time may have continued longer than you once thought, that fact does not kill God's hope. In fact, the opposite should happen: the longer time runs, the closer we come to the return of Jesus. Besides, the time is not the most important aspect—it is the certainty of Jesus' second advent, and He emphatically declares that He will

return. While we do not know the day or hour, He does expect us to watch and to be ready whenever it happens (see Matt. 24:42).

“Hoping is disciplined waiting,” E. Hoffmann observed. We need to remain true to the Hope. After all, what else is there? Is there any other perspective on the future for the Christian who sees hope like a bright silver thread running through the whole tapestry of the Bible?

VITAL AND PERSONAL HOPE

Scripture intimately links hope and resurrection (Acts 23:6). Instead of a “miserable hope” we now have eternal hope. First Corinthians 15:19-28 contrasts the present life (where we do our hoping) with the resurrection to everlasting life (where hope will be realized). As Paul says, if this life were all, what would happen to hope? That is why the resurrection is vital—it is the way in which hope is fulfilled. Death is destroyed—the ultimate enemy—so that our hope and future with God may be realized. Truly there is no other hope. That is why the blessed hope is so vital—so essential for Christian life.

This hope is also incredibly personal. Paul speaks of “the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven” (Col. 1:5, NIV). It awaits us where there will be no rust or moths (Matt. 6:19, 20). Who we are and what we will be—all this is defined by this hope. That’s why it’s so personal. Hope affects us right where it counts, and is truly meaningful for us all individually.

The biblical promise is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Hope is not something separate from our Christian life now, but an essential part of it—it is who Christians are. If we have Christ “in us”—in other words, if we are so totally in harmony with Him and His will that we are identified with Christ—then we have that wonderful hope of glory! Not that

this is the reason or purpose of hope, as if we look only for the reward, but it is its consequence.

Like a seed growing inside us, this hope that we plant in the soil of God’s word and allow the Holy Spirit to water will blossom into a mighty tree of assurance. We cannot simply say “I believe” and let such hope be just one of the doctrines we have signed our names to. This hope must become a personal reality for all of us, because in the words of Thomas Carlyle, “Man is . . . based on hope. He has no other possession than hope.”

Some hopes may be helpful and genuine, while others may actually oppose the blessed hope. We need to make sure what we hope for is in harmony with the hope of God. Why? Because Jesus comes for each one of us!

A PRAYER OF HOPE IN THE GOD OF HOPE

Assured of the power and presence of the God of hope, Paul declared: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13, NIV).

Our hope is to so fill us that we overflow with it. Only then can we share it with others by the power of the Holy Spirit! We are not just to be hopeful people, but people crammed full of hope! What attracts others to God’s gift of hope?—Christians who are so full of hope that they cannot keep the good news to themselves, but just have to share it.

If you feel that your own experience with Jesus lacks something, then go and taste again the excitement and fulfillment of hope in your life. For in the words of the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan, “Hope is never ill when faith is well.”

God wants your faith and hope to be well, to be spiritually healthy. He came at incredible sacrifice to bring us the good news that offers so much hope to us who once had no hope at all. With God, hope lives eternally now, and will be fulfilled

soon as Jesus comes to complete His promise of hope.

Hope cannot be forced. It will blaze as bright as the promises of God as it becomes through the Holy Spirit an essential part of the way we live. Recognizing how Jesus comes for each one of us, we look forward with joy for that wonderful meeting. Our aim—our hope—is for all to be part of that glorious Advent hope!

And when the day comes, as surely it will, we can say in the words of Isaiah: “He is our God! We have put our trust in him, and he has rescued us. He is the Lord! We have put our trust in him, and now we are happy and joyful because he has saved us” (Isa. 25:9, TEV).

Let’s all be there, exalting just that! As Paul tells the church in Thessalonica: “So then, encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18, TEV).

THE FORBIDDING OF HOPE?

I step out of the light into the darkness. Here in the basilica of Spain’s Valle de los Caidos each footstep echoes back off walls, ceiling, and floor. For a moment I pause to let my eyes adjust to the dimness.

In the cavernous emptiness the dark stillness is oppressive. I look up and see cracked and broken stone overhead—the mountain into which men have carved this mausoleum. Around me on the walls are huge, magnificent tapestries portraying every violent scene from the book of Revelation: dragons, flaming fire, and the apocalyptic horsemen riding on their mission of death and destruction. I can already hear the shrieking finale of *Carmina Burana* and the incessant drum-beat of doom.

As I approach the inner sanctum, eight horrific figures hooded in gray stone cowls stare down at me, reminiscent of Tolkien’s ring wraiths. Carved images of warfare crowd the

dark wooden paneling. Around me on the walls every giant angel wields a mighty sword.

This is the celebration of death.

Slowly I walk to the right into the memorial of the dead of Spain’s civil war. Dark. Gloomy. Sepulchral. Dim orange lighting glints harshly from metal and polished stone. A figure lies on the tomb, its body contorted in the agonies of dying.

Enough!

Overwhelmed with despair in this Hall of Valhalla, I expect the arrival of the Valkyries at any moment.

I know, I know. What did I expect? A mausoleum, the last resting place of Spain’s dictator General Francisco Franco, it’s not supposed to be a pleasant, uplifting experience.

But my heart is heavy and my thoughts depressive. For what is there here but the end of life, the sense of loss, the forbidding of hope?

Yet it only reflects a world that has chosen darkness over light, death over life, despair over hope.

I long to escape. As I turn on my heels and walk quickly back down the echoing chamber, I glance at the tapestries, still bearing their testimony of annihilation. Then I fix my eyes on the light shining in through the open door, symbol of hope in a dark, dark place.

At the end I’m almost running for the exit. But when the warm white light of the southern sun shines down on me, I feel reborn. As I turn and glance back, I see nothing, for the sunlight has overcome the darkness as the sunrise chases away the nightmare shadows.

Up above, a massive stone cross surmounts the hillside. Drawn upward to its arms, I look from its base across a green valley of delight. For in this instrument of death, there is hope, the Christian paradox. This is the answer to the tomb below—death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?

Living the Hope

Out in the brightness of the daylight, under a clear blue sky, I see eternity. An eternity that has no mausoleums, no throbbing drumbeats of death, no pain, no loss, no anguish, no despair.

In answer to the gloomy cavern below that forbids hope, the cross of Christ transforms His death and ours into a glorious resurrection.

For with our God of hope, hope can never be forbidden as long as we stay at the foot of his cross, looking up and waiting for the return of our crucified, now glorified, Lord.

"HOPE" IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS—
THAT PERCHES IN THE SOUL—
AND SINGS THE TUNE WITHOUT THE WORDS—
AND NEVER STOPS—AT ALL.

—Emily Dickinson

"IS THERE ANY HOPE?"

—sailors caught in an air pocket
after the 1927 sinking of the sub S-4.

"Here I am on the verge of retirement. I have been preaching the Adventist message for more than 40 years. I argued with the brethren about the need for going to college before entering the ministry, because I believed I would not have time to complete the course before Jesus returned. Now I am old and disappointed. Why hasn't Jesus come?"

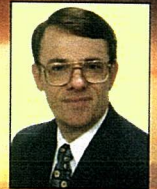
Why hasn't Jesus come?"

—Adventist minister

In these pages author Jonathan Gallagher explains the basis of hope—the Second Coming—that has motivated his entire life. He inspires us to live the hope—a balanced hope that motivates us, transforms us, and empowers the present. Not a passive hope that waits idly in the gloom, but one that walks boldly through the dark, holding out expectant hands.

Without hope we are only half alive. This book offers new strength to face the challenges of the present by renewing our confidence in God's promises for the future.

JONATHAN GALLAGHER
a former pastor, represents the
Adventist Church to the United
Nations. Other books he has
authored include *Fear Not? Why
Not?* and *The Ultimate God*.



US\$9.99 / CAN\$14.99

ISBN 0-8280-1671-2



9 780828 016711

Inspirational / Beliefs

FR REVIEW AND HERALD®
PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION