

From Despair to Hope

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

2nd in a three-week series

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1 Corinthians 13:11–13 (CEB)

¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become a man, I've put an end to childish things. ¹² Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known. ¹³ Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love.

Isaiah 40:28–31 (CEB)

²⁸ Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He doesn't grow tired or weary.

His understanding is beyond human reach,

²⁹ giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted.

³⁰ Youths will become tired and weary, young men will certainly stumble;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength;

they will fly up on wings like eagles;

they will run and not be tired;

they will walk and not be weary.

Romans 8:22–25; 15:13 (CEB)

²² We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. ²³ And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. ²⁴ We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

What is the nature of our hope in Christ?

Hope. The word is tossed around a lot. "I hope I win the lottery." "I hope the Rangers do better next year." "I hope I can find that lost ring." I wonder how many times each of us uses it in a week. And because it is such a commonly used word, those everyday meanings get carried over into our understanding of Christian hope. When Paul writes that we "were saved in hope," (Romans 8:24, notice the verb tense) what does he mean? What is this hope of which he speaks?

Simply put, Christian hope is the confident expectation that, one day, all things will be well, that goodness will win out, that we will live in peace and harmony with God and one another. There will be no more tears, no more pain, no more death (Revelation 21:4).

And how is it that we can be so confident about where things are headed, so hopeful about it all? It is because of the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection alone. If Jesus was raised to a newly embodied life after his death, then our hope is grounded in what has been and what will be. But if he was not raised, then we are only to be pitied, for our hope is false, grounded on a lie (1 Corinthians 15:8-19).

Anyone who has spent any time in my classes knows that the work of N.T. Wright has been foundational to my growth as a Christian and as a reader and teacher of the Bible. Wright wrote a massive book on the resurrection, but he also wrote one geared for a general audience. His title is apt, *Surprised by Hope*. I recommend it highly. Here are a few typical observations from Wright's book on the truth and implications of Jesus' resurrection and our own.

- “Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world by coming forward from the future into the present.”
- “The point of the resurrection... is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die... What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it... What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God’s future. These activities . . . are part of what we may call building for God’s kingdom.”
- “Salvation, then, is not ‘going to heaven’ but ‘being raised to life in God’s new heaven and new earth.’ But as soon as we put it like this we realize that the New Testament is full of hints, indications, and downright assertions that this salvation isn’t just something we have to wait for in the long-distance future. We can enjoy it here and now (always partially, of course, since we all still have to die), genuinely anticipating in the present what is to come in the future.”

The Holy Spirit

Let’s be clear. If Jesus was resurrected, we have hope. If he was not, we have no hope. But, of course, he *was* bodily resurrected. Thanks be to God! And his resurrection was a sure sign the kingdom of God had arrived, just as Jesus had said (Mark 1:15). And, thus, the arrival of God’s Spirit on Pentecost was another sure sign that God’s kingdom had come, though we still await its full consummation. That is the point of the above passage from Romans. Paul Achtemeier writes:

This passage therefore contains the promise that God will restore his violated creation to its original goodness. Yet because the promise of that restoration remains for the moment just that, promise, we have it only in hope. . . .

Yet the hope we have is more than simply a form of wishful thinking, more than the ability to persuade ourselves that things will surely be better in the future. The hope we have is sure because we already have a foretaste of its fulfillment: the Holy Spirit (v. 23). The reason the Spirit is a foretaste of the consummation is simply the fact that the restoration means above all the restoration of complete communication between God and his creation, and it is the Spirit who is the power of that restored communication. Therefore, such communication as we now have with God through his Spirit is a foretaste of the final consummation. Furthermore, such communication now takes the form of prayer, so it is in prayer that the Spirit provides us that foretaste. . . .

What that means, of course, is that we can have confidence in our future with God only because that future is in God’s hands, not ours. If it depended on us, we could expect more of the same botching of human chances with which history is replete. Only because God has taken control of our future is our future redemption secure.¹

The Kingdom Hope

Jesus taught his disciples to pray “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Easter is the first great answer to that prayer. Our celebration of Easter reminds us that we and this world are God’s creations and that our future is grounded in this world. Easter is good news for us and the world precisely because it is about the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Our hope lies not in some spiritual escape into heaven, but the restoration and renewal of God’s world, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17; Rev 21:1). If we speak only of a “spiritual” resurrection, with Jesus’ body left in the tomb or stolen away, Christianity becomes about nothing more than some private, other-worldly salvation, which is no hope at all. Instead,

¹ Achtemeier, P. J. (1985). *Romans* (p. 143). Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

borrowing N.T. Wright's phrase, resurrection makes us a "kingdom on earth as it is in heaven" people. It is why we do not despair, for we have a sure hope.

Bishop Wright puts it this way. "Let's make no bones about it: if Easter isn't good news then there is no good news. But if it is – if it is true that Jesus Christ is risen indeed – then Easter Day, and the Easter message, is the true sun which, when it rises, puts all other suns to shame." And so we cling to the truth of Easter, as we patiently await the fulfillment of our sure and confident hope. Yes, one day all will be well.

Daily Bible Readings

This week: The hope of resurrection

Monday, Luke 24:36-49 Jesus, resurrected, comes to the disciples. He is "flesh and bones."

Tuesday, Acts 2:29-36 Peter tells the crowd on Pentecost Jesus has been raised by God. That changes everything!

Wednesday, Acts 17:18-34 Paul tells the Athenians the same thing.

Thursday, 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 The resurrection of the dead is the essence of the Good News

Friday, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 Resurrection means transformation of the *body*.

Saturday, Philippians 3:1-11 What matters to Paul? Attaining the resurrection of the dead, i.e. being resurrected himself.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

The current series: *Jesus Behaving Badly*

Coming in October 2018: A cruise to Israel with Scott & Patti

For more information go to www.scottengle.org