

One Hope

Christian hope isn't wishful thinking, it's confident anticipation of the good things to come that God has promised and already begun. This hope should shape how we live our lives and be a witness to the world around us.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Christians are unique because they are defined by the future, we are heading somewhere (Ephesians 2:4-7, Colossians 1:5). Hope isn't wishful thinking, it's certainty in what is to come, like watching a football match when you know the result already (and it's the result you wanted!).

What we're hoping for can be summarised in three parts:

1. **New creation.** The world as we know it is going to be gloriously transformed by Heaven coming to Earth. It will be paradise restored: no scarcity, no frustration, no corruption, no injustice, no need to be wary, no death – only brilliant possibility and realised potential for us to explore and enjoy.
2. **New bodies.** The difference between what we are now and what we'll be then is like the difference between a tiny sunflower seed and the massive flowering plant it becomes (1 Corinthians 15:37-44). You won't do things you regret, and you'll be able to do far more than you ever dreamed of in this life as part of a totally united community of love.
3. **With Jesus.** We will see Him face to face, we'll hear His voice welcome us, we'll be able to touch those precious scars on His hands and feet that testify to how He got us there. We will see the full extent of His excellency, we will comprehend the majesty of His holiness, we will experience the unending love of God radiating from Him to us. Praising Him will be what we most want to do, even with every other brilliant thing available to us!

How can we be so confident that this is the case, when we've never seen any of it? Because something has already happened which guarantees it: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). We can understand (somewhat) this future hope

that's also anchored in the past by imagining a rope that we hold on to whose ends are in the past and the future. Holding on to this is faith, and looking forward to what has been promised with confident anticipation is Christian hope.



This hope makes the church one because it's the only hope we have! We've come from many different nations and cultures and backgrounds; we have different personalities and preferences, giftings and callings. But all of us, every Christian is holding on to this same hope: Jesus our Saviour. Self-centredness has no place when our future is God-centred. Greed – grasping for power or position, accumulating lots of stuff in this life – is stupid when you're trying to hold on to this hope alone. You can forgive others because part of this future hope is that God will ensure justice is fully done. Distress at your past and dissatisfaction with your present, which aggravate so many of our sins against others, are overwhelmed by the joyful certainty of a wonderful future. A united church is a prophetic statement of the hope we have, it gives the world a picture of the only hope there is.

Living a life of Christian hope isn't about adding a bit of cheerfulness to your perspective, it's about setting your hope fully in this, and nothing else (1 Peter 1:13). In other words, Christian lives should only make sense from an eternal perspective (1 Corinthians 15:19). Here are four things we can do to set our hope fully on Jesus...

1. Contemplate

You can't see this hope right now but you can think about it (Philippians 4:8). Look for things that will get your thoughts started on this upward trajectory, use these as springboards to contemplate a future in which they are the rule not the exception in life. We're to help each other to do this (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18).

2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our experiences of the Holy Spirit's presence and power are a taste of what is to come for us, a down payment of what we are to receive (Ephesians 1:14). He also changes us to make us more hopeful and fitted for the glory we are to experience (2 Corinthians 3:18).

3. Suffer

C.S. Lewis said that pain is God's megaphone to a sleeping world. Suffering makes us realise what can be trusted and what can't be. We do grieve but not as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Suffering also helps us to understand the weight of glory to come by creating a contrast with the present (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

4. Invest

Jesus tells us to invest in Heaven because it's the best place to put our resources (Matthew 6:19-21). You can't take it with you but you can send it ahead. Give your time, your talents, and your treasure to God's kingdom and you will receive far more back in the life to come than you ever gave Him. Practically this means playing your part in serving the church, and in loving others (caring for them, helping them, advocating for them). These things should be costly: you won't be able to do other things now because you do these things instead, - which is fine if your hope is in something far greater. When we make radically hopeful choices about the jobs we do, where we live, our levels of involvement with church and people around us, our money, our children, etc. then the world will see that we have a far greater hope than they realised.

Questions:

- Would you say you were most aware of your past, your present, or your future? What are the reasons for this?
- How would you describe Christian hope to someone who didn't understand it?
- What was helpful about the "rope of hope" illustration, and how did it fail to explain fully how Christian hope works?
- Why is hope in eternity to come so important for how we live today?
- What are you looking forward to in the new creation, with your new body, and with Jesus?
- What has helped you to think about eternity recently?
- How are you most likely to be distracted from thinking about the future?
- How are you setting your hope fully on your eternal future? What difference should this make to your life?
- Which of the four application points that Luke gave to help us put our hope more fully in Jesus did you find most surprising?