



Romans 8:18-25

TITLE PAGE

Hope. Hope is an important in what we are and what we should expect as a Christian. Paul says in that famous verse from 1 Cor 13 “*these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.*”. Love is very important – but so too are faith and hope. I’ve done plenty of sermons on love and a fair few about faith but I’ve actually never done one on hope – until now. So what’s hope all about?

ALEXANDER POPE

The poet Alexander Pope once made this famous quote: “*Hope springs eternal in the human breast...*” Well, that’s a nice positive quote. Because it tells us how important hope is in helping and motivating human beings. As we’ll find in a moment, it’s hope that gives us that will to live and grow as people. But look at this.

THE GRIM DOCTOR

Here’s the bad side of hope. This is a position that some of you may have been in – the message that a loved one is dying and there is no hope of recovery.

DANTE

Or even worse – these famous words from Dante’s Inferno – the words Dante supposed are over the gates of Hell – abandon hope all you who enter here.

DICTIONARY

The English dictionary definition of hope puts what we are talking about well.

Desire accompanied by an expectation or belief in fulfilment (Webster’s Dictionary)

When we hope for something, we have a desire for something we would like to see fulfilled in our lives. In fact most human beings live their lives moving from one hope to another – the hope of a good job, the hope of a nice house, nice car, children, whatever. Here’s a personal question.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE FOR?

I’m sure you have your own personal answers to that. But what we would hope for our lives sometimes is more wishful than real.

A BIG WIN?

The Lottery. Chances of winning the jackpot: about 14million to 1. Some people who do the lottery do win the jackpot. The vast majority never do and never will. It’s poor odds even by hardened gambler standards.

IPSWICH TOWN REACHING THE PREMIERSHIP?

Close to impossible!

LOTTERY HOPE

I call this kind of hope Lottery Hope *A hope based on slim or non-existent expectations.* Perhaps a better description would be hopeless hope. Most gamblers operate on hopeless hope. But its surprising how many impossible hopes each of us have in our lives. When you were a child, what did you want to be? An engine driver? A footballer? An astronaut? Lottery hope and as we all grew up, we got more realistic.

REASONABLE HOPE

But there is a second sort of hope. I call it reasonable hope. It’s where we have looked more maturely at the possibilities and have reasonable desires and expectations.

A PROMOTION

For example if we are in certain kinds of jobs we would expect to get a promotion or a rise. It’s more likely in some jobs than others. In some kinds of public service jobs, you get to expect your increment. In other jobs,

you know it's going to be lottery hope!

TEENAGERS

If you have children, you have that hope that one day they will become teenagers. It's a reasonable expectation, but sometimes bad things happen. That said the hope of a baby becoming a teenager in a slum in India or South Africa may be more like lottery hope.

EXAMS

And of course there are exams. This is very topical at this time of the year. People hope they will pass but those who have worked hardest and are of known good performance expect to do well and have a reasonable expectation. Those that have been lazy have lottery hope.

But in both of these cases, there is a distinct possibility that whatever we hope for, there is the possibility of failure or disaster. I go on holiday this week. We hope we are going to have a good time. I think I have got everything planned just so. But it is still only reasonable hope we will have a good time. What if one of us falls ill? What if we crash on a French motorway? What if there's a freak storm in Spain that trashes the caravan? Bad things can happen and they've happened to us before. But it is our reasonable hope that we'll have a good time.

CERTAIN HOPE

But this morning I want to look into God's definition of what the word hope should mean to a believer and that's Certain Hope - *A hope based on something that will definitely happen.* Let me remind you of a verse we read earlier:

VERSE

I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18. Paul's expectation was that there was a day coming, an eternity coming, where all the sufferings of life would pass away. He never speaks of it as might happen, or could happen if he got lucky, but always spoke of it as a promise of God to those who follow Jesus and trust in Him alone. Here's another along these lines from the writer to the Hebrews:

VERSE

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. Hebrews 11:1

Here are some pretty firm words. Sure of what we hope for – certain of the things we cannot see. In fact the word for hope in the NT is the Greek word:

ELPIS

Here's what it means : *When related to faith in Christ in the NT suggests "confident expectation" or "solid assurance" (Mounce's Expository Dictionary)*

It's really important for us to get our heads around this. Heaven is not a pipe dream, it's promise of God. Therefore, because God has promised it, so it's going to happen. Here's how a preacher called Victor Shepherd sees hope in the NT

VICTOR SHEPHERD

"Hope is a future certainty grounded in a present reality."

This is important because if we are certain something is going to happen we can be properly prepared for it. If we have a visitor to our home – if we're hoping they come, we make the necessary preparations (make up the spare bed, get extra food in and the rest of it). Here's what Paul said in verse 24: *For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope.* The difference between hope and the reality is that we do not see what we hope for at present – it's something we are moving towards – but one day we will have it. But why can we be certain? Because we look at God's past performance and we see that He always keeps promises. You did a series 3 years ago just before I came on Hebrews 11. What was the passage about – the God who always does what He says He's going to do.

That's what Victor Shepherd wrote this second quote.

"Without hope, Christian faith collapses." Hope is what faith is all about. We have faith because we are hoping for something expecting it. Just a minute I may hear some of you say – this or that happened to me and I felt God let me down. How can I be sure He's going to keep His promises about eternal life? Let me ask – did

God let you down on a promise He had made; or did your expectations of what you think God ought to have done let you down? My experience is that my expectations of God usually differ from what He gives – and usually with the wisdom of hindsight, I find He was right.

So God does not want us to hope with lottery hope or reasonable hope even, but with certain hope that is borne out of our spiritual life here. As Christians we don't just have one hope but a few. I've listed six for you here. I'm not going to cover these today – they are here for your edification.

SOME CHRISTIAN HOPES

1. The hope of eternal life. (Titus 1:2; 3:7)
2. The hope of salvation. (1 Thes. 5:8; Rom. 8:24-25)
3. The hope laid up in heaven. (Col. 1:5)

SOME CHRISTIAN HOPES

4. The hope of resurrection from the dead. (Acts 23:6)
5. The hope of the gospel. (Col. 1:23)
The hope of the fulfilment of all the promises presented in the gospel.
6. The hope of His calling. (Eph. 1:18; 4:4)

Why have I preached on this today? Because if our hope in Christ is moved from lottery hope or reasonable hope to certain hope, our faith levels will change – we'll get a "faith lift!" It will make a difference in the way that we live. Let's look at two of the verses we read again – verses 24 and 25

VERSE For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For which of us hopes for something we see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

We so often quote Paul's words in Ephesians that it's by grace we are saved by faith so it's surprising that we have these words – by hope we are saved. How come? We could not have trusted unless God had put a certainty into our minds that He's there, that Jesus is alive, that Jesus wants to change our lives, that His body and blood was shed for us. When we realised that was true then our hope became a hope of certainty.

So we have a hope, an expectation of an eternity secure in Jesus Christ. It should make a difference to our lives.

WHAT SHOULD HOPE DO FOR US?

- help us to be patient – life can be difficult and we might seem to go from one crisis to another – but we have a hope, an expectation that we don't see now but it's promised to us, despite all the pain of life now. That patience changes the whole way we see our problems and issues.
- make us view life positively – what makes life work for everyone is that we have the hope and expectations of certain things in life. If we know we are God's people, then God's promises aren't just for eternity but are from now. Rather than accept what the world throws at us God has given us the power by His Spirit to be overcomers. Sometimes we can't escape the problem, but we can escape the misery and depression that comes with it.
- make us bold – that was Paul's story. His hope was an eternal one and realising that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain, he was quite prepared to follow God wherever He called him to go. Jesus is calling us as His people to follow Him. You may look at God's call and think it too costly – but we have everything to gain and nothing to lose except this life. That was a freedom that Paul had that made him very effective and productive as God's apostle. Both history and my own experience show that the same has been repeated countless times over down the centuries and even now. When you've everything to gain and nothing to lose because of your hope, then in Christ, God can do all things He wants to do through us – and that could be amazing.

Prayer