

“Hope Is For Now!”

Psalm 43  
Romans 15:1-7, 13

July 12, 2009  
Dr. Harry S. Hassall

When Billy Graham first visited England, he was summoned before Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who looked somber and frightened from the turmoil of the English post-World War II recovery. Gruffly, he growled at the evangelist: *"Young man, do you have any hope?"*

Millions of Americans awoke this morning and essentially thought the same thing, *"Is there any reason to get out of bed today? Is there any reason to try it again? I've lost my job and now my house; is there any reason for me to hope?"*

Ewart Watts, quite rightly, once said: *"The Bible is the greatest inventory of hope of all time."* Twice I have served a small country church in Williamson County, south of Franklin, called "New Hope Presbyterian Church," a congregation founded in 1806 when Middle Tennessee was a dangerous wilderness. Our spiritual forebears rightly understood that the Christian faith is always one of "new hope" even in the midst of the frontier danger o death from the Indians.

Contrast this with the ancient heathen world, whom Paul identifies as those "without hope." That ancient world was faded and jaded, full of darkness and meanness; the best was bad for most people. So much so, that we are reminded that Sophocles wrote: *"Not to be born at all--that is by far the best fortune; the second best is as soon as one is born with all speed to return thither whence one has come."* That world--or any world without Christ--is as Dante described written over the mouth of Hell: *"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."*

I.

As we look out upon the world in which we live, there is a great deal of despair, so much so that it is often intolerable. Someone recently called for the immediate reduction of the human race from six billion to one billion, due to the predicted GLOBAL WARMING cataclysm. Then there is the growing global war of civilizations between the Islamofascists and the West, both Christian and secular, arising out of the Islamic ascendancy in the Middle East. Soon, we are told, Iran, which threatens to wipe Israel off the map, will have the nuclear bomb. There is ever-increasing worldwide poverty and AIDS and bitter uncivilized political battles at home, in the midst of one of our worst economic crises in decades.

Prophets of despair and disciples of nihilism surround us seeking to inundate our country through badmouthing America and downgrading the Church. Pessimism is everywhere. Some, not knowing the Biblical revelation about humankind and our depravity, have cursed life, because there are still problems to be solved, because racism

and war are still bedfellows of the race. Too many among us bow down to a new pantheon which includes astrology, demon worship, [and now idol or hero worship], pornography, nudity, sexual perversions, and terrorism. Anarchy and violence destroy hope for many. In addition, some in the Establishment also have given up hope in this time of national and international clash of cultures, wars galore, terrorism rampant, disease and death everywhere, and the nagging threat of total global destruction arising out of human abuse of our planet. With Winston Churchill we all cry out for hope! *“Preacher, do you have any hope?”*

When will people learn that UTOPIA will only arrive with the return of Jesus Christ? When will leaders learn not to promise more than they can produce? Some thought that in the 1966's when the Government first declared war on poverty, there would be no more poor. Others supposed that with the passage of civil rights legislation, racism would vanish. The world needs to hear again the Biblical message about the human race, that men and women in spite of our aspirations and dreams and plans and motives and rehabs and reformations and revolutions, are still sinners needing help from above.

## II.

To just such a hopeless generation, God has entrusted to us HIS WORD OF HOPE. Our text tells us how Paul revealed the antidote to such despair: *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of THE SCRIPTURES we might have HOPE...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. 15:4, 13]

Contrast today's spirit of despair with the attitude of young Italo Renzitti, about whom G. Ray Jordan writes. This eleven-year-old Italian lad had been an innocent victim of a grenade explosion in World War II. Blinded and with his arms blown off, he learned to read Braille with his tongue. Said he, *“When I grow up, I'll be a musician. I'll play a flute probably. My tongue is useful.”* Thus his sensitive spirit knew how to overcome despair and to rejoice in hope!

The Psalmist in Psalms 43 experienced despair and hopelessness in his day. He wrote: *“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?”* His conclusion he found in WORSHIP, as he exclaimed the summation of it all: *“Put your hope in God!”* In Old Testament days people looked to God's promises and God's Messiah for their ultimate sense of hope.

I came upon a fabulous story which illustrates our point. In a certain art gallery in London there is hanging a painting of Faust playing a game of chess with Satan. Faust, who had gambled his soul away, had only a few pieces left on the board. Among them was a king and a knight. Blank despair is painted upon his face, while hellish glee is obvious in the countenance of Satan. For years chess players from all over the world had passed before that painting and studied carefully the position of the remaining pieces on

the chess board; unanimously they had concurred with the artist that Faust indeed was checkmated, that he was in a corner and hopeless. However, one day a world-class chess master came to study the painting. Late in the day he broke the silence in the gallery with a loud cry, *“It is a lie! It is a lie! The king and his knight have one more move!”*

That, in a nutshell, is our message. Satan whispers in our ears that all is lost, that our life is utterly hopeless. He assures us that the drink which is now controlling our lives has so enslaved us that we cannot continue living. He hisses hopelessness to us when we lose our job or are forced into foreclosure or bankruptcy. He convinces us that our marriage is lost and destroyed, that there is no hope of reconciliation. He presses despair to our hearts when death takes our life mate. He feeds us the poison of despair when cancer strikes, when we fail that critical entrance test to graduate school, when we find rejection in young love. In all these situations life seems meaningless and suicide inviting. He ever whispers despair!

### III.

Nevertheless, the Scriptures clearly teach that the King of Heaven and His Knight-on-the-Cross always have one more move! This Biblical doctrine of hope rests on three foundations: In the Old Testament we experience God as a promise-keeping God. In the Gospels Christian hope is built on the pledge given to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Epistles speak of our own experience with this God of hope who has carried us personally through many of the turmoils and troubles of our lives. Biblical hope is always eschatological, always pointing to the end time, to the coming again of Christ, to “that blessed hope.” No wonder, then, Paul can say: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

Christians know that it will only be upon the return of Christ that things ultimately will be set right and accounts settled. A despairing Christian is really a contradiction of terms. The true Christian refuses to become bogged down in the mud of despair or in “the slough of despond.” The Christian must be an optimist, not of the Pollyanna variety, but of the realistic variety. Christian hope, then, is never cheap. It is not blind to the sufferings and troubles of life.

In England there is a 17th century church upon which walls are found this inscription: *“In the year 1653 when all things sacred were throughout ye nation either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley, Barronet, founded this church: whose singular praise is to have done the best of things in the worst of times and hoped them in the most calamitous.”* Is not that magnificent? Would we not like to worship in such a church where the human founder had reflected such inspiration? Christian hope shines through, even in the darkest of days.

Watts painted HOPE as a figure battered and bowed, sitting upon the globe, playing her lyre with only one string left unbroken.

Now, that is Christian hope! It is the “in-spite-of” variety of conquering hope. Christian

hope is backed by the sovereign personal power of the Almighty Everlasting King. Therefore, shout the message from the rooftops to our despairing neighbors. There is hope! Jesus Christ is the hope of the world! We all had better believe it!!

*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.*