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## Hope

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"Let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8).

"...if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23).

"...to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

"...that ye may know what is the hope of His calling" (Eph. 1:18).

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4).

"...but Christ as a son, over His house; whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6).

"And we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fulness of hope even to the end" (Heb. 6:11).

"...the bringing in of a better hope..." (Heb. 7:19).

"...looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

## Hope a Positive Thing

To these passages many others could be added of like character, the word in each being the word 'hope'; having a different connection, but always representing something very definite. That is the first thing to say about it, that hope in the Word of God is not merely a passive or ethereal thing, a kind of resignedness, that just says, "Well, I hope so..." and that is all. In the Word of God it is something very positive. Before it is a state where we feel hopeful and are of a hopeful outlook or disposition, before it is anything like that, it is a thing in itself; it is a hope, the hope, something quite definite, quite positive, being an object, a goal, a something in itself; it has the reflex effect of putting hope into us.

It is among quite definite things which are the direct work of the Holy Spirit in us. In this word so familiar, "Christ in you, the hope of glory", "Christ in you" is the mystery that has been hid and is now made known. And, by the way, that is collective there. It is really, 'Christ in the midst of you'; it is a Body statement. The mystery has to do with the Body; the Body is the mystery, and it is Christ in the midst of you, that is Christ now in the Body, the church, fulfilling His word - "There am I in the midst" (Matt. 18:20). That is only by the way. While Christ in the midst in that way is the mystery, the effect of Christ in the midst is the hope of glory, and we know that Christ in the midst is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, here now in the church, and therefore the presence of Christ in and by the Holy Spirit in the midst is the hope. It is a fruit of the Spirit, this hope; it is a direct work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has always God's goal, God's object, before Him. With the Holy Spirit, the end is a very real thing, and the end is always present with the Holy Spirit, not future, because God is not past, present and future. He has nothing to do with time as to His own nature and Person; He is eternal, outside of time. He is the Now, the Everlasting Now. So that the Holy Spirit's presence as the Spirit of God has the end right here now, and it is because of that that when the Holy Spirit is present, hope is such a tremendous thing. When the Holy Spirit is really present and in fulness, there is a sense in which we have reached the end in our spirit. I do not want to seem mystical, but why is it that, despite the very long delay, and so much that the natural reason can lay hold of and does lay hold of to make such a matter as the coming of the Lord an unreal thing, so many have taken that attitude to which Peter refers, "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:3-4)? They are making it a time thing, Peter says, and they forget that a thousand years is as a day with the Lord, and a day as a thousand years. Some of us have had some very painful experiences along that line. Almost from infancy I have heard people say that the Lord was coming in their lifetime. Some of them said that the Lord had shown them that He was coming in their lifetime, that they would not go into the grave, but they have gone long ago. That can crystallize into a tremendous case for just abandoning the whole thing about the Lord's coming. But why is it, in spite of all that sort of thing, you sing a hymn about the coming again of the Lord, and if you are singing in the Spirit, tremendous life rises up, you feel lifted up; all this other thing simply departs. It is just this very thing: that what for us might be a thousand years ahead so far as time is concerned, He has that now. He is eternal; He is not then. He is ever-present, and the Holy Spirit always brings the ends of God right into the present in the Spirit. John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" or "in the day of the Lord" (Rev. 1:10). If it was that - "in the day of the Lord" - he was outside of time and he was right there then in all that was happening long ahead. Those things have not all happened yet in the matter of time. He was in the Spirit.

The point is that the effect of the Holy Spirit is hope, because hope is an attribute of God, "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). God Himself is the God of hope. That is an attribute of God, and the Holy

Spirit brings in the attributes of God and makes them living in the church when He has His place. What we are seeing here now at the outset, is that this matter of hope is not just some weak, passive resignedness - that we hope so. It is a very positive thing, this hope, both as a goal and as a goal brought in spirit into our hearts now; very positive, very definite.

### **Hope Presupposes Non-Realisation**

And yet, while that is true, the word itself has its own meaning, and in Scripture it is quite clear that hope carries with it a presupposition. It pre-supposes non-realisation now. "What a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:24). The very fact that there is a hope means non-realisation while hope lasts. Hope goes immediately there is realisation, and the Scripture is very clear about that, that so far as we are concerned on our human side, hope means non-realisation now, and it is very important to realise that other side of hope. There is the tremendous reality of hope that brings us in spirit into a kind of realisation; yet, on the other hand, the Scripture is quite clear that this word means what it does mean - hope. The trouble with the world today and a lot of the trouble with the church is probably that what is happening today, both in the church and in the world, is disillusionment. The church is suffering a terrible disillusionment just now, speaking generally. The whole tendency of the church for many centuries has been to get established here on this earth. Not only do national 'churches' get established, but that is the whole trend of soul-life, to get established, to get rooted, to build up, to have something fixed, settled, permanent, and what is happening today is that everything is suffering a tremendous shock and disillusionment. That is what is happening in the world, whether it is alive to it or not. Things that are happening are a tremendous smiting of men's false hopes.

Man conquers the air, and has to go and hide himself under the earth to save himself from his own inventions, from his own conquests. They are destroying him wholesale; the more he invents and the more he conquers, the more in terror he is of his own work, and he is fast bringing about the utter impossibility of living on this earth, shortening the possibility of life here by his own inventions and conquests. He thought to establish the world and to establish life and master everything, and he is such a victim to his own efforts that now he has really got to hide himself from his own work. How many realise that? But this new world, this new order is an utterly false hope. They talk continually about the new order and the new world they are going to build, and within a few weeks some new invention shows itself that makes the world an impossible place to live upon. Only to think for a moment of the possibilities of what is happening now; get that on a wholesale scale, add to it gas, let that thing loose on a wholesale scale, and who is going to survive? You say that they will master that as they have mastered everything else. Yes - with a new terror. Well, false hopes... an awful disillusionment going on everywhere.

Why? Because hope only lies in one direction. God has fixed hope in Himself alone; it is hope in God through the Lord Jesus Christ that is the only hope.

### **Hope Centred in Christ**

Then we get this whole series of hope. There is the hope of the believer, the individual believer, the hope of salvation. There is the hope of your calling; there is the hope of His calling. There is the hope of the church; the hope of the church is not establishment, it is translation, that blessed hope. There is the hope of Israel; where? In Christ their Messiah only, but He is their hope. There is the phrase, "the hope of the Gentiles", "in whom the Gentiles hope"; the hope of the Gentiles, of the nations, the hope of the world. It is all centred in Christ from the individual, through the church, to Israel, to the

Gentiles, from the centre to the circumference. The hope is fixed in Christ and that is the only hope, and the hope that gathers up all others is that blessed hope - His coming.

There has been a tremendous amount of preaching of the Gospel without the hope of the Gospel. What is the hope of the Gospel? The hope of the Gospel is the Lord's coming. Preach the gospel which wants to make a new world and do all sorts of things, make people kindly, the brotherhood of man and all the rest, preach that without the hope of the Gospel, and it is another illusion. How are you going to make men love one another? That is, I think, why the Holy Spirit has brought those three things together through Paul: "Now abideth faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Faith - that is the effect on God, that is Godward, that is the link with God. Hope - that is the effect upon ourselves; God being the great reality of faith, there is hope in ourselves and concerning everything ultimately. Love - that is the effect upon other people of the link with God and the hope that is in us. Anybody who really has strong faith in God and the resultant hope from God, can afford to love. Put that round the other way. If we are not sure of the Lord and if we are not governed by a strong hope, then we shall be peevish, selfish, cantankerous, jealous; all these things will come in because we are afraid of things not going right, afraid of losing something. Absence of love, or the contrary of love for other people is because we are not trusting the Lord, because in us there is some uncertainty. Given strong enough or real enough faith in the Lord, and the resultant effect of hope, love to men must issue, will issue.

Faith, hope, love; faith, Paul says, will be changed to sight, therefore faith will pass. Hope will be changed to realisation and possession, therefore hope will go; but love, the result of these, is the greatest; it goes on forever.

Hope is a very positive thing, many-sided, but it is centred in Christ, and the great hope that is in Christ is His coming again.

I was saying that the Lord must have us on this basis of hope, non-realisation, and so He does not allow any rooting in, any establishment on the earth, any getting fixed at all.

Recently we were speaking about the effect of vision - "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2), and then by faith Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of promise. From an established civilization of a very high order to be out in a tent, perhaps not more than a day or two at a time in the same place, rooted out of this world, brought into the land and not given an inheritance in it, not so much as a foothold; he looked for a city. The effect of vision in getting us clean out of what is here is that we are out of an established civilization into a tent; metaphorically suspended between heaven and earth. And what is the effect of that? Just think of the effect of Abraham's life.

An old Greek scientist once said, "Give me a fulcrum outside of the world and I will move the world". He was talking science, but what a lot there is in that spiritually. Is it not true that the men who have been outside of the world have been the men who have moved the world; that is, the people who had nothing here in this world to lose and nothing that they were afraid of losing, it had gone in Christ. Someone else has said, "Live continually as those ready to depart". It is only saying the same thing in another way. The tremendous spiritual effect of Abraham being in a sense outside of the world! May it not be that the Lord is trying to get the church there again? We have talked for years about the heavenliness, other-worldliness of the church. It does seem to me that the Lord is stressing that just now tremendously - not that we had got our roots in or were seeking in any way to get established, but nevertheless the Lord is bringing home to us our own message very strongly about the pre-eminence, the importance, of spirituality. The point is that hope takes you outside. It

is non-realisation now; it takes you outside of the present, keeps you fixed to something beyond and keeps you mobile.

It is an awful mess and awful business that we have gone through this week, but the word came to me - "has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). "Who against hope believed in hope" (Rom. 4:18). He has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection from the dead; that has a lot of new spiritual value when you see everything plunged into what looks like such hopelessness, and it is something of the Lord that in the midst of it all there are people who are not under it all spiritually, but on top of it, in spirit triumphant. The bodily weariness and the mental weariness of it all is very deep, and yet there is a spirit of triumph that is the miracle of His hope within.