

Sunday 18th April 2020

[In place of Sunday Worship here are words on the theme of *hope*, in particular the “*living hope*” of 1Pt.1, 3. May it please God to speak to us through his Word and may He give us grace to ponder it carefully. As it is offered so let it be received – prayerfully, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace and peace be with us all.]

Gal.1 3:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” – 1Pt.1, 3-9

Dear Friend

Many, in commenting and advising on the situation we find ourselves in with regard to the threat posed by the corona virus and the measures taken to combat it, have spoken about ‘hope’. Surely not without reason or justification. If anything insists on being victorious, on prevailing against a threat that is facing us, it is hope.

Indeed. Hope upholds the fighting spirit; it refuses to be defeated, become apathetic, lose courage, yield to fear etc. Without the hope that we will eventually overcome this threat, that the sacrifices required are worth it and that perseverance will pay off, how can there be trust that doing what is advised is the right thing to do? How can there be trust in the authorities and the common, unified response that they seek?

Yes, hope in this situation is vital and it makes a lot of sense to invoke it. Like a shipwrecked person is kept afloat by a raft of some sort, eventually to make landfall, so hope keeps us

a float on a storm-tossed sea of uncertainty and threat to try to regain solid ground. And the “floats” of hope, the things that can inspire hope in us, are for instance the expectation that work on a vaccine is progressing, that the measures which are in place are doing good, that various strategies are effective, and so on; but also good and kind things that happen which we hear about or are engaged in, the experience of life-affirming moments.

Now all this is well and good and useful in its way. But it stands in contrast to a hope which Scripture calls “living” and which the Christian has and draws on. It is a “float” which in truth is a very present rescuer who has every which means at his command to secure rescue.

We all by virtue of being human, of having been born into this world, can hope and do so. We have an inborn faculty to hope. But our hoping is limited in its reach (because it is based on matters limited to this world and to this life) and our hopes are easily confounded. Much as our hoping is helpful in navigating life, it is confounded by sin, by sorrow and by death. What is the hope that lights up the darkness of sorrow, and of sin, even of death? Peter reserves the word “living” for the hope that does.

Jesus speaks of the *kind* of hopes man holds out against the darkness. In his parable of the rich farmer he describes a man whose hope is in the shape of a bigger barn which he wants to build for himself so he can store in it his riches, which – so is his hope – he will then live off happily for the rest of his life. Jesus concludes: “*But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’*” (Lk.12)

Blow up this kind of hope to the n-th degree, yes to gaining the whole world, says Jesus elsewhere, put your hope in the fulfilment of every desire you may have to satisfy it, - it is of no profit if you lose your soul over it. The question Jesus makes us face is: What is left for a hope that is not anchored in God? for all that we treasure if we are not rich with God?

The Christian has a hope which will not be confounded – he has a living hope. He has it by virtue of being “*born again*” – that is, he has it because he has come to faith in Jesus Christ. It is a *living hope* because it is not made by us and does not subsist in us, *but is made by God for us and subsists in Jesus Christ*. I will point out two things of what Peter says about God’s work of hope for us.

(1) God made for us this hope “*according to his great mercy*” – meaning we have hope because through Christ’s death on the cross we receive God’s mercy and grace, the forgiveness of our sins, are given a Saviour who died in the sinner’s place and so abolished death (2Tim.1,10), even for the sinner that he may live. Sorrows may pierce, sins accuse, death frighten – yet the Christian has a hope that conquers all: God’s mercy in Christ’s death – described by the prophet in these words: “**Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**” (Is.53, 4-6)

(2) God's work of hope for us was made "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" – meaning that as Christians we have our own resurrection to look forward to even as we bear our own cross, that what Jesus by his resurrection left behind and overcame we shall too, and what he rose 'into' we shall inherit: **"to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."**

Dear friend, yours by faith in Jesus is a hope that cannot be shaken, freely and fully established by the mercy, love and faithfulness of God, a hope which, the more familiar you are with the ground of it – Jesus Christ – the more you will trust to keep and guard, strengthen and guide you.

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." AMEN

Lord, when our hopes and fears lead us astray and we forget that in you we have a living hope, have mercy on us and give us grace to place all things into your hands, knowing that you care for us and remembering that you said: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Amen

[take time to pray, bring all your cares before God and seek for His peace to be made known to all, for His will to be done and give thanks; the Lord's Prayer]

2Thess.3, 16:

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.
