

The Joy of Hope

God's blessings abound in the life of a Christian. Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3). Among these countless blessings is the joy of hope.

To understand the true joy of hope, let's first consider the tragedy of a lack of hope. In Acts 27:20, when Paul and his shipmates in their voyage to Rome were caught in the midst of a tempest, Luke, who was also in that company, said, "And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away." These men were fearful for their very lives, fully believing that there was no hope for their rescue from the storm. Hopelessness can cause one to give up. In Jeremiah 18, the mighty prophet delivered another one of many exhortations from the Lord to Judah to "return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." (Jeremiah 18:11). The people replied, "There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." (Jeremiah 18:12). "It is hopeless," they declared. They allowed that feeling to lead them away from God. The singer, Asaph expressed a similar sentiment in Psalm 73, although to his credit he caught himself before he fell too far. The prime example of hopelessness is seen in the life of Job as he suffered the many slings and arrows of Satan's attacks. The troubled patriarch said, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope." (Job 7:6). Later he lamented, "He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree." (Job 19:10). Job had not given up on his belief in God, yet he felt his life was passing by in hopelessness.

Each of the aforementioned situations bespeaks a life, or at least a moment in life, of sorrow and desperation, of pessimism and defeatism. That's what it's like to have no hope. Thanks be unto God that even though we may from time to time find ourselves sinking in the Slough of Despond, we don't have to go under and drown in it. Solomon wrote, "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope..." (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

In the Word of God we find that there is a parallel between hope and patience with the former being fed by the latter. Romans 5:3-4 reads, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." Romans 8:25 says, "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." In I Thessalonians 1:3 we read, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." As we learn patience through the experiences of life (James 1:2-4), we see how God is by our side each step of the way. With that realization, we develop greater hope with each ensuing event that challenges us. We learn to patiently wait on the Lord (Psalm 27:14) and, in so doing, we are able to face each day with hope that is based on the knowledge we have of God's constant care for us.

It's interesting that many times hope is misunderstood as nothing more than a wish or a calculated guess. The hope that is based on faith in God is not a mere wish. Instead, it is trusting in the coming of the light in the midst of darkness. It is envisioning the shoreline while being battered by the angry waves. It is picturing the destination in the mind's eye while still on the journey.

Jeremiah wrote, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." (Lamentations 3:26). In Jeremiah 17:7 he said, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Solomon said that when hope is realized it is "a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12). One of the definitions of "life" in that verse is "reviving." We have hope, and when that hope is realized, it revives us. This hope helps us get up each morning with a heart that is ready to take on all challenges of the day. It helps us pillow our heads at the end of the day with the realization that God had blessed us in abundance during our waking hours. Paul spoke of "rejoicing in hope" in Romans 12:12. Solomon said, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness..." (Proverbs 10:28). "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." (Psalm 31:24).