

The Hope – Our Comfort

By Mike Lorence

OUR PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE

As believers, God through Jesus Christ has taken care of three aspects of our lives:

1. Our Past
2. Our Present
3. Our Future

Our Past – when we confess Jesus Christ as our lord and savior our past sins are completely forgiven and God remembers them no more (Isaiah 43:25; Hebrews 8:12). In addition we are partakers of a divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and now have the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus Christ dealt with our sin nature and past as the second Adam (Romans 5:10-21).

Our Present – although we have a new nature and our sin and sins from the past are completely forgiven we still have an old man (in the mind) that we must deal with and which causes us to sin (Romans 7:25). But God has made a way for us to still receive forgiveness by confessing our sin (1John 1:9). We are blessed with every spiritual blessing and more (Ephesians 1:3ff).

Our Future – We have everything God has made available up to this point, but He still has much more in store for the believers. There are still two spiritual powers interacting in our lives – God and the Devil. We still have to deal with our physical death and corruption. Yet we still have a hope for the future – the promises of God – that we can trust and depend upon. (2 Corinthians 1:20; 2 Peter 1:4). One of those promises is the hope of the Return of Jesus Christ for the believers in the Grace Administration.

THE HOPE

“The great hope of the Christian Church is the return of Christ and our gathering together unto him.¹” God has given us so much yet he still has more waiting for us.

Ephesians 2:7 (KJV)

⁷ That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

We still have the EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARDS US coming! I won't even try to explain exceeding riches but we will look at the Return of Christ and what it means for us.

Why do we call it The Hope? We hope for the things we cannot have now. We can pray and “believe” all we want and we will not speed up the Return of Christ. God knows when it will happen but it has not been revealed so we don't know. However, we can count on it with all certainty because God promised it.

Acts 1:9-11 (KJV)

⁹ And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

¹ Wierwille, V.P. (1977). *God's Magnified Word – Studies in Abundant Living Volume 4*. New Knoxville, Ohio, American Christian Press. p.227.

¹⁰ And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

¹¹ Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

There are four aspects which will comprise the “end times” all which will happen in the following order:

1. Christ coming FOR his Church, the body of believers from the day of Pentecost until this event, and the will be gathered together and meet in the air (the Gathering Together)
2. The events written in the Book of Revelation when Christ comes WITH his Church
3. The first and second resurrections of the dead
4. The final or very end (*telios* (tel'-i-os) Greek for meaning there is nothing left to do, completely finished) time when death is destroyed and all things are subdued to God

We are going to focus on the first aspect – The Gathering Together which is one element of our Hope.

MEET CHRIST IN THE AIR

Thessalonians provides the most concise details regarding the Gathering Together of the believers of the Church in the Grace Administration. It’s interesting to note that the Book of Thessalonians was the very first epistle written to the Church and yet it covers the great truth of the Hope. It must be important for a believer to know. Let’s take a look at it.

1 Thessalonians 4:13a (KJV)

¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren,

Paul states that God doesn’t want us to be ignorant of what he’s about write. So we should make sure we pay close attention to this topic.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (KJV)

¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

The Word calls death for a Christian “sleep” because it’s similar in that there is no remembrance in death. Christians who have died are not alive in heaven but are sleeping. They are going to wake up. Those who teach and believe that those who die and are now alive are ignorant of this truth from God’s Word.

Because we know that our brothers- and sisters-in-Christ are asleep and are going to wake up again, we don’t have to sorrow as others who don’t have this hope. WE HAVE HOPE. Yes we will sorrow at the death of a beloved believer yet not like those who don’t believe in Christ. People need hope to survive. If they don’t have it they make it up. We have a pure hope and one that is guaranteed by God. It’s not a false hope of life-after-death. It’s eternal life, everlasting life. One that begins at our new birth.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 (KJV)

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

We have this hope BECAUSE WE DO BELIEVE that Jesus died and rose again (Romans 10:9). Jesus set the pattern for those in the future. God raised his son, Jesus Christ, and he is going to do the same for all those which sleep in Jesus or are born-again and had Christ in them. They are God's children too.

When we are born-again we receive the spirit of God. It is the token or earnest of what God still has in store.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (KJV)

¹³ In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,
¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (AMP)

¹³ In Him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, and [as a result] believed in Him, were stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit [the One promised by Christ] as owned *and* protected [by God].
¹⁴ The Spirit is the ^[e]guarantee [the first installment, the pledge, a foretaste] of our inheritance until the redemption of *God's own* [purchased] possession [His believers], to the praise of His glory.

This spirit is the guarantee of what God still has coming for us. We've got the stamp of authority. In biblical times the stamp was provided by a signet ring. The ring worn by those with authority and power to conduct business. Our "stamp" is holy spirit and we know we have it when we speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12: 3).

1 Thessalonians 4:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep.

Paul is saying that God is telling him to tell this to the believers in Thessalonica. And the truths in this book apply to you too. What is he writing by the word of the Lord? That not only will God bring with him those who are asleep but also those which are alive. All those believers still alive when Christ comes FOR his Church will follow those who are asleep. He's not leaving anyone behind.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Now Paul is explaining how all of this is going to happen. First the Lord himself – yes Jesus Christ is coming from heaven with a shout. Why wouldn't he shout? This is a wonderful, joyous

occasion – one he has anticipated for centuries. He’s going to be excited! This is a shout of summoning everyone to assemble together. He’s calling everyone together. And he’s not coming alone. He’s bringing the archangel too! I don’t know which one as an argument can be made for both. Michael because he is the one who fights for God’s people and Gabriel because he is the one who brings the messages. Regardless, it will be an amazing day!

The dead in Christ shall rise first. If they are first then there must be something else following.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (KJV)

¹⁷ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The word “then” provides us the timing or sequence of events. First the dead in Christ shall rise THEN those who are alive and remain shall be caught up. This is the Gathering Together – Christ, those who have fallen asleep in Christ and those who are alive and remain. EVERYONE. The words “caught up” are sometimes referred to as the Rapture from the Latin word *rapturo*. Another translation for this word is “snatched.” We will be snatched for the clutches of death and out from the domain of the Adversary.

Christ does NOT come to the Earth but we meet him in the air. It is the beginning when the whole body of Christ will all be together forever. How tremendous will that day be?

When you count the number of times the word “shall” is used in three verses (v.15-17) it makes a strong statement. It is used five times. The word “shall” is in the absolute tense and it means that it absolutely will happen – not may happen but it is guaranteed. We have God’s promise.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 (KJV)

¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Once we know the truth of what is going to happen and we are not ignorant it is a comfort. We are to remind one another with these words. Lies are not comforting but the truth of God’s Word always is. When a believer falls asleep in Christ we don’t have to have sorrow as though that’s the end. It’s not. It’s just temporary. We have part of our Hope that they are getting up to be with Christ and we are all going to be together again. That’s true comfort.