

## LIVING IN THE HOPE OF THE LORD'S RETURN

Romans 8:24

There are many tragedies in modern life. Lawlessness has invaded our world, even our international airways. On every hand today there are staggering problems, but I believe the greatest tragedy to overtake modern man is a sense of despair and hopelessness which seems to have settled down upon him. Our young people are asking, "Is there any rhyme or reason in our existence?" The greatest minds of our age are talking and writing about the despair and the hopelessness in the world. Our universities have been invaded by a sense of total despair. Philosophy today is bankrupt, it has no message for man.

Before he died, the historian, H. G. Wells, made this statement: "I predict that the generation in which you and I live is the last generation upon this earth." Before Dag Hammarskjold was killed in a plane accident he said, "Unless the world has a great spiritual rebirth, civilization is doomed." The late Bernard Shaw said, "If there is life on other planets then they are bound to be using the earth for their insane asylum." Melvin Laird has recently said, "It is becoming less and less popular to be a Christian, and it is probably going to become dangerous in America to be a Christian." Despair and hopelessness have settled down upon the hearts of man and it is sweeping our world as a great tidal wave. Sixteen hundred years ago, the great preacher, Chrysostom, said that man is not plunged into disaster as much by sin as by despair. Where despair sets in, nothing good can take place.

In contrast to the hopelessness of our age, we turn to the New Testament, where we find an entirely different picture. On every page of the New Testament is a message of hope, wonderful, abiding hope. I Timothy 1:1 says, "Jesus Christ is our hope." Paul, in Romans 15:13, speaks of "the God of hope." I Peter 1:4 says, "God has begotten us unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." In Colossians 1:27 the apostle says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Then Romans 8:24 says, "We are saved in hope" which does not mean that we hope we are saved. Hope in the New

Testament is to "know so." "Hope so" is "know so" in a New Testament sense. When Paul says we are saved in hope, he means that at the very center of the Christian experience, and at the very core of our being, is a living hope which cannot be destroyed by anything in this world. It is a part of our Christian life - hope. In secular use, this word "hope" is a weak and wishy-washy expression. We hope our favorite team will win. That is a wish and a desire. This is what our hope is - a wish and a desire - a yearning. But this is not the New Testament hope. The New Testament hope is "confident expectation," based upon the promises of God who cannot lie. Do you wonder at the difference in faith and hope? They are closely linked, but faith refers to the past and the present; hope has to do with the future. Emil Brunner was absolutely correct when he said, "As a man cannot live without oxygen, so there is no meaning to life unless there is hope." I ask you, do you have hope? Are you living in hope or are you living in despair and in doubt?

Many people who are not living in despair live in great doubt about life and the future. Are you living in the hope of eternal life today? This is the privilege of the children of God. There are many hopes that the Christian has that are based upon the word of God, but there is one hope that overshadows all others. There is one hope that is the source of all hope. There is one hope that we must have in our day in order to live for Christ, in order to witness for Christ, in order to preach for Christ, in order to pray. In order to keep our souls alive, the church must come back to the one hope that is spoken of in <sup>5</sup>scripture: the blessed hope, spoken of in Titus 2:11-14. Paul says, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." No man today who believes in the blessed hope of the Lord's return is without hope. No struggling saint is without hope if he really believes that Jesus Christ is going to come again to straighten out this world's affairs. I want us to think

about this hope which is so relevant today.

I. The CERTAINTY of the hope. The certainty of our blessed hope is all wrapped up in this word "looking." Paul says, "always be looking for the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord for you, to transport you to glory." We have a lot of wonderful hopes that are true. The saints of God hope for a home in heaven, a mansion in the Father's house. This is a legitimate hope. It is going to come to pass, but it is not the blessed hope, it is not the most important hope, and it is not the hope you need above any other hope. The saints of God hope to meet their dead loved ones in the "sweet by and by." This is a hope - a blessed and wonderful hope but it is not the one blessed hope that is spoken of in Scripture. We hope for a new body that will be fashioned like unto Jesus Christ. We are going to receive that new body, but that is not the blessed hope of God's people or the church. The hope of the church is Jesus. The hope of the saint is to see Jesus. The hope is to look and to believe that He is coming and that He is going to set all things right.

In the last three weeks I have received two letters that were signed "Maranatha." ~~#####~~  
~~one####~~ # What a blessed way to end a letter in these days. That is the way Paul ended I Corinthians. Read I Corinthians 16:22 sometime. This is just the word for the fact that the Lord is coming. That is what this means in the Aramaic tongue. "The Lord is Coming." Do you realize that church history tells us that the early Christians used this as a salutation. When they met one another on the streets they ~~greeted each other~~ said, "Maranatha." The Lord is coming! Does it make any difference whether you or I believe that? It makes all the difference in the world! We should live, Paul says, in the consciousness of the fact that the Lord may interrupt our affairs and our lives any moment and come again. The certainty of His coming is our blessed hope. G. Campbell Morgan said, "I am not looking for death, I am looking for the Lord." Are you looking for the Lord? When we forget to look for the Lord we get bogged down in the world, thereby losing our perspective and our hope. The only hope today is in the Lord and in the coming of the Lord.

II. The CHALLENGE of the hope. You will notice that this text is one of the greatest on Christian consecration and sanctification in the entire Bible. ~~The~~ The blessed ~~hope~~ hope is placed in the middle of this call to complete consecration and holy living for Christ. Some people say that preaching on the second coming of Christ is "pie in the sky" theology, and that it divorces us from life's realities. That is not true. The people who believe in the second coming of Christ are concerned about the present and they have a power wherewith to deal with it. The New Testament always links Godly living in this world with the hope of His coming. What is the challenge that is offered to us in the hope of the Lord's coming?

(1) The first challenge is personal purification of our lives. The apostle John talked about the hope in I John 3:2-3. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." I know of no incentive in the world for holy living as the ~~incentive~~ <sup>prospect</sup> of the coming of our Lord. There are a lot of people who say they believe the Lord is coming. It is easy to say and preach it; it is another thing to believe and live it. John says every man that has the hope in him - the hope of seeing the Lord - purifies himself even as He is pure. Do you wish to know who has the hope of seeing the Lord and is looking for Him? The person who is purifying himself. It is not the man who is necessarily orthodox and knows the most about Daniel and Revelation! It is the man who is ~~holy~~ <sup>holy</sup> - who is looking for the Lord to come!

In this day in which we live we need to purify ourselves. If you have to drink two cups of black coffee before breakfast before you are able to face the day, you need to purify yourself. If you cannot bring yourself to come to an evening worship service or to prayer meeting, you need to purify your motives; something is wrong in your scale of values; you need an inward purification. How are we to purify ourselves? The definition is not left to us. It is not according to our rules and our ethics, but the Bible says we are to purify ourselves as Jesus is pure. You do not look at your neighbor to find out the



standard. We are to live according to the Word. If we know what Jesus would do, we are to do it and we are to purify ourselves even as Jesus. John says if we have the hope of seeing Jesus we will purify ourselves. Are you purifying yourself today? You are if you have the hope. If you are not, you do not have the hope. The reason for despair in our land today is because of sin and rebellion against God! When men are right with God and purify themselves, there is hope in their lives. When sin creeps in, there is no hope.

(2) Then there is the challenge of personal evangelism. The apostle Peter links the second coming of Christ with personal evangelism. He makes the amazing statement in II Peter 3 that we can actually hasten the coming of the Lord. You can never reconcile the freedom of man with the sovereignty of God. This is one of those irreconcilable things in theology. ~~according to Peter~~ <sup>Peter</sup> says we can hasten the coming of the Lord by the way we live and the souls we win. The church in our day, in the main, ~~not~~ <sup>helps carry</sup> entirely, has forgotten the Great Commission. A church should support no program directly or indirectly unless it ~~is~~ <sup>helps carry</sup> out the Great Commission. Our task is to share the ~~gospel~~ <sup>gospel</sup> and win people to Christ, baptizing them and teaching them the Christian way. The task we have today - the main task - is to get the church OUT of the church - out yonder witnessing. There is not one verse of Scripture in the Bible which tells the sinner to come to this church or to that Sunday School class, but there are a hundred verses telling us to go out and compel them to come in that they might hear the ~~gospel~~ <sup>gospel</sup>.

I thank God for the bus ministry that we are starting in our church. It has increased every Sunday. This is getting the church out of the church. I thank God for our teachers who are visiting consistently, and for superintendents who care. But today I call on every teacher of God's Word to realize anew and afresh what your task is under God. Your task is to get the church out of the church. The purpose of the Sunday School is to go out and reach people for Christ. No matter what good we do, if we fail to go out and reach people, we have failed in the great task of the church. As we look for Christ, this spurs us into evangelistic action. It is very interesting, but evangelistic preachers are those who believe in the coming of the Lord. The more they believe in the eminency of the

coming of the Lord, the more they preach with urgency. R. G. Lee goes so far as to say that there have been no great evangelists or great soulwinners who were not pre-millennial. I ~~cannot afford~~ <sup>don't have the facts</sup> to say that dogmatically, but I think it is <sup>generally</sup> ~~basically~~ true.

III. The CHARACTER of His coming. You notice that Paul speaks of the hope as the "blessed hope." He did not just say the "hope," but the "blessed" hope. This word "blessed" is the word makarios. It is used by Jesus in the Beatitudes. It is a stronger word than "happy," but we could say "happy hope." It means "blissful, joyous, glorious" hope. Does it make you happy to hear a sermon on the second coming of Christ, or does it disturb you? It does one or the other. The coming of the Lord will be the most glorious thing you have ever witnessed, or it will be the most frightening and terrifying event that you have ever experienced. How would the world feel today if Christ were to come? Do you think the world would be happy? No, indeed, the world would not be happy; that is the reason this doctrine is not preached; this is not a popular topic. It is a truth the world does not want to hear. How about you?

Some of you are rejoicing. Some of you are almost rejoicing, but you are not quite sure. Some of the rest of you are not rejoicing because you know deep in your heart that you are not ready for the coming. It would not be a blessed hope for you. If it is going to be blessed, there must be a happy review. Paul says it is a happy hope. There is going to be a review of our lives when He comes. You can mark it down, there is an appointment with the almighty God we must meet. The lost man will stand before the Great White Throne - that is a judgment of damnation. No one is going to get into heaven on the basis of his works. If all he has is a record written in the books, without his name in the Lamb's book, spoken of in Revelation 20, he is lost.

But you and I, as Christians, are going to have a review. Will it be a happy review? Paul says in II Corinthians 5:10, "We must all stand before the bema, the judgment seat of Christ." I do not know how you feel when I preach this but it penetrates deep within my soul when I realize that I must stand before God. I have to answer to God



for my ministry in the First Baptist Church and for my life, witness, and stewardship. I am going to stand there and you are going to stand there. It will be a review. God will review our lives in relationship to Him. The problem today is disobedience and sin. For just one example on a practical level, you will have to meet God with what you are doing with your money. You will have to stand in review before God in relationship to your church. Some pretty well-meaning people are saying, "The church is done for."

When God set Israel aside because of her rejection, <sup>of the Messiah</sup> He turned to the church. In this dispensation of grace He shall work with the church until the fullness of the Gentiles ~~has come~~ <sup>come in</sup>. This has not yet taken place. His instrument of redemption today is the church of the Living God which He purchased with His own blood. With all of its imperfections, it is the church of Jesus Christ through which He is working. He has not abandoned His church. He loves it and He gave himself for it. You and I must love it and give ourselves for it, or we are going to have to answer for it in the bema of God. The Communists are behind this movement of debunking the church. It is God's church, it is not my church or yours. How are you treating your church today? If you were suddenly removed from the rolls, would you be missed? A lot of you would be. Some of you would not because you do not come that much. Many would not be missed.

We are also going to be reviewed in relationship to our home. Is your home a place of Godliness or is it a place of materialism? We are going to have our lives reviewed in relation to the work. I was visiting in our city recently and a man said to me, "One of your deacons was in my place of business. Someone offered him a beer and this deacon said, 'I do not drink. I am a Christian and a deacon in the First Baptist Church.'" I knew that about this deacon without being told. He is a godly man. I visited some people down the street from where I live. They are members of a denomination far removed from ~~us~~ <sup>ours</sup> and this lady said to me, "I just cannot believe your doctrine. I could never be a Baptist - but I can believe in the lives of the members that I have seen." These are good reports, but sometimes I hear the other side. How are you living in the world? Do you have a testimony for Christ? People know whether you have or not. Our lives are going to be reviewed according to our

relationship in the everyday world. When the Lord comes, will it be a happy hope or will it be a fearful hope? It will be one or the other.

We have all read about Adolph Eichman. He killed 6,000,000 Jews. One night he was hanged on the gallows in Israel. His body was cremated and his ashes were sprinkled in the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Someone said, "Eichman is finished." No, he is not finished. Eichman must stand before a holy God, just as you and I must stand before Him. Both our hope and our terror is bound up in this fact. Our hope is to see the Lord. If you are prepared to see Him, it is the most blessed and happy thing that could ever happen. If you are unprepared, it is the most terrifying thing that could ever happen. Are you ready to meet the Lord in death? If you are not, ~~nothing is~~  
~~in the air~~ you can get ready, right where you are. Turn from your sins and to Jesus now.