

Hope

By Kent Heaton

The frailty of the human spirit cannot survive without the expectation of something better. Since the beginning of time the desire for that which is beyond has brought man to the shores of a new world and touched the edges of space. A desire to know what is on the other side of the horizon compels the insatiable drive of man to reach past what he knows for what can be known. The bounds of the habitation of man does not allow him to see beyond the veil of death and remains wrapped in an enigma yet challenges his desire to know what is beyond. Death's finality underscores the limits of what man understands of life. And then comes hope.

When God created man He made him in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27). Man is a spirit dwelling in a mortal body. Moses writes, "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalms 90:10). The body will die but the spirit lives on and this is where man must understand the true character of his nature. There is something beyond the grave. Life is not about the here and now. All that we see about us is temporary (2Cor. 4:18). Hope is the message from God that life is an eternal presence without end. The travails of this life are but a "light affliction" (2Cor. 4:17) and beyond the sunset of life is a new day of resurrection.

Hope is the knowledge that sickness is but a temporary malady. Lazarus suffered greatly as a beggar at the rich man's gate but in death he was "comforted" (Luke 16:25). The faithful of the Lord were stoned, sawn in two and slain with the sword but with hope sought a homeland where God had prepared a city for them (Heb. 11). The joy of hope is brought about by tribulation, perseverance and character (Rom. 5:1-4). "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:5-6). C. A. Bartol said that "Hope is the parent of faith" and without faith we cannot be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6). How can we live without hope?

The comfort found in hope is lifting the eyes beyond life and seeing the favor of God bestowed upon His children. Death is not to be feared. The end of life is the beginning of resurrection. Paul best defined hope in Romans 8:18. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The world is passing away but our hope in God does not. Pleasures of the flesh are only moments of desire fulfilled without lasting joy but hope in the eternal is everlasting. Jesus looked beyond the garden of Gethsemane and the place of the skull to the reward of sitting at the right hand of the Father. He lived with hope. He died with hope. He raised the third day to instill in all of us our hope of a new day.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls" (1Peter 1:3-9).

What It Means To Serve Christ

By Dee Bowman

Serving Christ is what Christianity is all about. Jesus said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me" (John 12:25-26). To serve Christ means that you actually give yourself to Him; you follow Him. It means you subordinate your will to His, give Him the command of yourself. He thus becomes the main focus of your life. And believe me, that's not easy.

The implications of that service to Christ are several. May I cite a few for your consideration?

To serve Christ is to make Christ your personal manager. This action of service relates to every area of a man's life. If he is a Christian, he must necessarily be a good father. And if he is a good

Christian, he is a good neighbor, a good worker, a good citizen. You can't pick and choose, either. Leave one off and you're no longer serving Him like you ought. Christ's religion cannot be partial; it must entirely transform man (Rom. 12:1-2).

To serve Christ is to make your life like His. When you read about Jesus in the gospels you are immediately arrested by His greatness, His goodness and benignity, His total dedication to His mission, His love for all. To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to live Him, too. To love Him is to want to be more like Him. And isn't it so that if you love someone sincerely, you want to be near them? Regular worship, regular association with His word, a burning desire to serve Him and His people—all are indications of seeking to reproduce the example of Christ in our lives. These actions will result in your handling life's activities as He would—even in times of difficulty. All that comes of a revolutionary act of self-denial. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 8:23).

To serve Christ is to recommend Him to others. How can we say we are dedicated to Him and His teachings when we seemingly have little inclination to recommend Him to others? It seems to me unthinkable that we could consider ourselves to be His disciples if we are not willing to confess Him before our fellows (Matt. 10:32). We are always anxious to recommend to others what we use and what we think is best—our car is the best, so is our brand of cereal, our kind of iPad or iPhone— but what about Jesus? Are we somewhat timid about recommending Him to others, about inviting them to a service where His life and His word are to be discussed? How can we truly be servants when we are embarrassed about Him whom we serve? Listen to Paul. "For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day (2Tim. 1:12). If you would serve Him, you must recommend Him.

To serve Christ means a separation from the world. There can be no middle ground with Jesus. If we don't give Him our all, we don't give Him anything. Is that not the meaning of His saying in Matthew 6:21? "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." The point is single-mindedness. If the eye is focused on Christ, the illumination needed for such service can proceed from it; if not, there can be no real service. In fact, in the next verse He says, "No man can serve two masters..." Please note that separation from the world does not imply isolation, for such is not possible; but it does mean a sanctified heart, a mind set apart from the mundane, a focus that is higher than mere fleshly satisfactions. No person can serve Christ who is not willing to be different from the world; it's part of who and what he is. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). In verse three, he cites the reason. "For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God." Dead to the world, alive to Christ!

To serve Christ, you must have your eyes fixed on heaven. This world is not fit for much dedication. 'Tis foolish indeed to place undue affections on it, "for the world passeth away with the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1John 2:17). Hope of heaven is a permanent fixture to the Christian. It propels him. It delights him. It excites him. Hope means he will not let go. It means he knows what's over there. He understands that life here is but a sojourn; but there's something infinitely better over there. No person is the true servant of Christ who has his hopes fixed on what's here and not on what's there, for what's there is far superior to what's here.

"And whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).