

THE BLESSED HOPE

As we approach the end of this present world as we know it, there is one of three kinds of hope we can have; no hope, a false hope, or a blessed hope. Unfortunately for the world at large, they have no hope; they have no idea what eternity holds, and they're just living day to day without any realization that God offers them something very special, a blessed hope, and of course these are the people we've been commissioned to try to reach with the gospel.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you had no hope? For the first 22 years of my life I had no hope. I wasn't raised in a Christian home, I had never read the Bible, or had it read to me. I didn't know Jesus. I had no hope in light of eternity; no hope beyond the grave. I lost my dad when I was 14 years old and I had no idea if he was in heaven or hell or just nowhere. I was in a hopeless condition. I was living for self with no expectation of a better life to come. Perhaps you can identify. This is the sad condition of most of the world today, isn't it?

Then there is the professed Christian world, and I would have to lump a large portion of the Adventist Church in with this group, because Babylonian teachings of various kinds have made devastating inroads into the church over the last several decades. For the most part the professed Christian world today have a false hope, don't they? Some think, because they grew up going to church and have never done anything really bad, they must be Christians, and therefore saved. Some think that because they have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and maybe even had a true conversion, they're going to heaven when they die, regardless of how they choose to live afterward. Some think there's no possibility of living without sinning, and therefore God must have a plan to save them in their sins. Some think Jesus did all of their obeying for them and as long as they still believe in Jesus there's nothing to be concerned about. Some have the false hope that Jesus will change their character when He comes and then they will wing their way to the Holy City. Some think that because of loyalty to the right organization they will eventually enter the pearly gates; for surely their leaders would never lead them astray. Some believe that when the Holy Spirit is poured out in latter rain power, then they will be overcomers; then they will have victory; then they will take this gospel of the kingdom into all the world, but each one of these false hopes have eternal consequences, and those who hold them are making a terrible mistake.

I'm not sure what the various denominations believe about the latter rain of the Holy Spirit, but I do know that many SDA's are not only confused about it, but are clinging to a false hope, because the latter rain is coming only upon those who have first perfected a Christlike character.

Let me read it to you from *Testimonies for the Church, volume 1, page 187*, “Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation.”

So, we see two things here before we receive the latter rain. We must overcome upon every point we’re confronted with, and we must stand and not faint when we are tested, no matter what it is. That sounds like a tall order, doesn’t it? And it would be utterly impossible if we had to rely upon ourselves to do it. Fortunately for us we have a Saviour; Jesus the pattern Man, who has already overcome upon every point and has stood every test, and if we heed the counsel of the true witness, who is Jesus, we will receive the latter rain and be fitted for translation. But wait a minute, wouldn’t we already be fitter for translation if we’ve overcome upon every single point and stood every single test? I mean, how much more perfect can we be? How can we be more fitted than that? What more could God require? What does the latter rain do for us anyway?

Turn with me please to **Acts 3:19**. There’s a clue here that will help us understand. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” The times of refreshing here is a reference to the latter rain, and just to make sure of that, notice what it says in *The Great Controversy, pages 611, 612*, “The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are ‘the times of refreshing’ to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said: ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus.’”

According to what Peter says, the latter rain, or the refreshing from the presence of the Lord has something to do with our sins being blotted out just before Jesus comes. So, rather than the latter rain changing our character when Jesus comes, it fixes it. The latter rain is not given to enable us to overcome sin; as we read, this is what the early rain is for. The early rain results in conversion and victory over sin, or our justification, and the latter rain makes conversion and victory permanent. In other words, it seals us. In **Ephesians 4:30** it says, “Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

And so again, the latter rain does not make God’s people sinless, this is the work of the early rain and it’s something we are to experience now, before we receive the latter

rain. That's why God tells us, in *Testimonies to Ministers, page 507* that, "Many have in a great measure failed to receive the former (**early**) rain. They have not obtained all the benefits that God has thus provided for them. (**And what are the benefits? victory over all sin**) They expect that the lack (**of victory over sin**) will be supplied by the latter rain. When the richest abundance of grace shall be bestowed, they intend to open their hearts to receive it. They are making a terrible mistake." Why? Because they think the latter rain is going to do for them what the early rain does, namely, give them victory over all sin.

Evangelism, page 702 says, "The latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement." There it is again. A purified soul comes before the latter rain.

And notice also *Testimonies for the Church, volume 1, page 619*, "I was shown that if God's people make no efforts on their part, but wait for the refreshing (**Latter rain**) to come upon them and remove their wrongs and correct their errors; if they depend upon that to cleanse them from filthiness of the flesh and spirit and fit them to engage in the loud cry of the third angel, they will be found wanting. (**That means it's not going to happen**) The refreshing or power of God comes only on those who have prepared themselves for it by doing the work which God bids them, namely, cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Now, there is much more that could be said about the latter rain. There are several statements that suggest that the latter rain is twofold; it's something that is coming in the near future and will be poured out in the most abundant display of power this world has ever witnessed, but it is also something that is available now and has to do with our sanctification, but I'll let you study that out for yourself. Then after you've studied it out for yourself, go to my website at gospel-workers.com and click on the sermons tab and then on the sermon title "Who Receives the Latter Rain?" I think you might come away with a different idea than you may have had before. But it's clear from the statements we've already read, that all who think that the latter rain will give them power to stop sinning are indulging in a false hope, and that's the main point I wanted to bring out about that, because I think there's lots of confusion about that within Adventism.

Then there are a few who have a Blessed hope. They have discovered that they must not only accept Jesus as their Saviour from sins that are past, but that they must abide in Him by faith and bring forth fruit to His glory. They will walk even as Jesus walked. Not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. They will have learned by experience that there's power in the blood to keep them from falling when temptations come, and they will understand that sin is a choice and that they can live by the power of the Spirit without giving in to it.

The definition of Hope from Webster's dictionary is, "To desire with expectation of fulfillment." And Strong's Concordance says, hope is "To anticipate usually with pleasure." And so, to ascertain whether or not we have a blessed hope we must ask ourselves, are we anticipating the return of Jesus with pleasure? and are we expecting the fulfillment of that event, soon? and is it our desire to meet Him in peace when He comes? And most importantly, do we have the assurance right now that we are going to be one of the few that will see the fulfillment of that blessed hope?

Now that isn't to say that we can say we are saved, because we can lose the blessed hope if we choose to reject the offer of salvation, but we should know right now whether or not we are saved at this very moment. Our Father in heaven wants us to know this and be confident that He loves us and wants us to spend eternity with Him, and if we have that blessed hope now, it will make a big difference in our attitude and happiness here and now, and doubt about it will do just the opposite. There are plenty of miserable Christians around, and we don't want to be one of them, and with the blessed hope you won't be one of them. In **John 5:24** Jesus Himself said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." And **1 John 5:12** says, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." And so, yes, we can and should know that we have this life here and now, because that's the testimony of Scripture and faith makes it real.

Between no hope and a false hope, false hope is more hopeless than no hope. Turn with me to **Revelation chapter 3** and I'll show you what I mean. But before we read, let me ask you a question. Do Laodiceans have no hope, or a false hope? They have a false hope, don't they? The Laodicean state is about the worst state to be in, because Laodiceans think they are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" but don't know that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They don't have the righteousness of Christ. That's the height of false hope. There's only one condition that's worse, and that would be the sin against the Holy Ghost, or the unpardonable sin, and unfortunately it's the next step most Laodiceans will take without realizing it.

Those who have a false hope are deceived, and if one is deceived, they don't know they're deceived. Only the Holy Spirit can undeceive a person. And so, it's important that we remain humble enough to be influenced and corrected by the Spirit and not be so cock sure of ourselves that we have the truth on every point, or that our spiritual condition is better than what it really is. We need to have a teachable spirit at all times just in case we are mistaken and be open to holy influences.

Those who have no hope are the cold, and those who have a blessed hope are the hot, and those who have a false hope are the lukewarm. And God says, "I would thou wert cold or hot." I would that you had no hope or a blessed hope, but because you have a false hope and don't even realize it, "I will spew thee out of My mouth." Because you sin and think you are sinless; because you think the righteousness and the sacrifice of My Son will cover you while you are sinning, I must forsake you, because you have forsaken me. Because you are of the world, but think you are not, I must reject you. Because you say you are Jews (God's chosen people) and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan, I must appoint you your portion with the hypocrite, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This false hope really is a very serious thing, and unless we recognize it, it will be the cause of our demise in the end.

Let's take a look at what the Bible says about no hope and a false hope. Turn with me to **Ephesians 2:11-13**, and we want to especially notice **verses 12**. Paul says, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having **(what?)** no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

Paul says, those who have no hope are without Christ; Jesus is absent from their lives; the Holy Spirit is lacking; they're separated from the source of life. It's like the apostle John said, "He that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." To be without Christ, or out of Christ, is the opposite of being in Christ. Those who have no hope are, "Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel." An Alien is, "A person who belongs to another family, or another nation." If we are not children of God and joint heirs with Christ to His throne, then we are children of the devil and his kingdom of darkness, it's just that simple. We must belong to one family or the other. And to make no choice is to choose the wrong one. Those who have no hope are "strangers from **(God's)** covenants and promises" it says. They have made no agreement to follow God, and therefore have no faith in His promises. They are without "God in the world", and if they are without God in this world, they will be without Him for eternity. This is the fate of all who have no hope. That's why we must find them and bring to them and give them the opportunity to receive a Blessed hope.

As I was putting this study together I found something interesting in ***Bible Commentary, volume 6, pages 1008, 1009***. This is not EGW comments, but nevertheless it's historically true. "In the catacombs of Rome the word 'hope' is commonly found in Christian inscriptions, but it is never found in the inscriptions on heathen tombs."

Think about it, Christianity is the only way of life that offers hope. To be sure, there are others that offer hope, but it's a false hope. Only true Christianity offers a blessed hope. Truth be told, those who have no hope and those who have a false hope are both without Christ. Neither one belongs to the family of God. Neither one can claim the promises, and both will be eternally lost unless they wake up. The problem is, those with a false hope are sleeping more soundly than those with no hope. Those with a false hope think they are "in Christ", but they're not. They think they belong to the right family, but they don't. Most think the promises of God are unconditional. They believe their ship will sail safely into the heavenly port, but it's going to go to pieces on the rocks. They think that they not only have God in this world, but also in the next, but they are deceived by a false hope.

Turn with me to **1 Thessalonians 4:13** and we'll read some of the most comforting words in all the Bible. Paul writes, "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."

Then in the next five verses Paul addresses a misconception the Thessalonians had concerning their loved ones who had died. They thought there was no hope beyond the grave. They believed that Jesus was coming back within their lifetime, and if a brother or sister was unfortunate enough to die before His return, there was no hope of heaven. Maybe they were mixed up with the new theology of the Sadducees, because they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. But whatever the case, I'm kind of glad they misunderstood, because we would have never had these comforting words. Have you ever seen someone who had no hope mourn the loss of a loved one? It's sad, isn't it? Many times they become bitter, hateful, and even suicidal, when a blessed hope would change all that.

Then Paul goes on in **verse 14**, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. **(Not from heaven, but from the grave. When a Christian dies, their resurrection is as certain as the resurrection of Christ)** 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 **(or go before)** them which are asleep. 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: 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

I don't have the words to tell you how much this truth means to me, because I didn't know these things when I was 14 years old and looked at my father lying in a casket, or a few

years later when my best friend was killed in a rollover accident. It's extremely important that people understand these things, so they can have a blessed hope and not a false hope or no hope at all.

I'd like to take a look now at a few instances in the Bible where there seemed to be no hope, because many times, even as Christians, there seems to be no hope in certain situations; no solution to the problems we face; no way out of difficulties we find ourselves in. But is God's hand shortened that it cannot save? Is His ear too heavy that it cannot hear? Not if we believe the Bible. God's word is full of stories about hopeless people who were healed from a variety of maladies.

And by the way, it is possible to have no hope and a blessed hope at the same time under certain circumstances. What do I mean? Suppose someone has a terminal illness, like stage 4 colon cancer. Maybe the doctor says, "there's nothing I can do. Put your house in order, because you only have about 6 months to live." A person like that might have no hope that they can be healed, but they can still have the blessed hope, can't they? Absolutely. Can God heal a person with a terminal illness? Of course He can, but we must always pray that God's will be done, because we don't know if an extension of life will be a good thing or result in something evil.

So, let's think about some of those Bible stories where certain people started out with no hope but ended up having a blessed hope. In **Acts 3** there's the healing of the lame man who was laid every day at the gate of the temple to beg for money, but one day as Peter and John came by they looked at him and said, "we don't have any money to give you, but we have something better. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk", and as they stretched out their hand to this poor sufferer, the mustard seed grain of faith he had took hold, and for the first time in his entire life, he got up and walked and leaped and praised God. In an instant he went from having no hope to a blessed hope.

Then there's the story in **John 5** about the impotent man who laid by the side of the pool of Bethesda waiting for the moving of the waters, remember the story? For 38 years he had this problem, but one day Jesus came along and asked him if he would like to be healed, and the man said he didn't have anyone to help him into the water. By the way, that wasn't a holy angel that came down and stirred up the water, because God doesn't work that way. Jesus simply said rise, take up your bed and walk, and the man did just that. One moment he had no hope, but a moment later he was rejoicing in the blessed hope.

How about the woman in **Luke chapter 8** who had an issue of blood for 12 years and spent all her living on physicians that were no help. She thought, "If only I can get close enough to touch Jesus' garment I'll be made whole", and that's exactly what happened. For 12

years she had no hope, but somehow a little hope sprang up in her heart when she heard about Jesus and she was instantly healed by the touch of faith.

And how about the children of Israel at the Red Sea? They were up against it, weren't they? No place to get away. Their destruction seemed unavoidable. But a miracle takes place, the waters parted and they walked through the river on dry ground. Such is the possibility for those who have no hope to have a blessed hope.

You see, these stories are not just stories of physical healing or deliverance but can be likened to spiritual healing and deliverance as well. Justification, or forgiveness and the new birth don't take a long time to happen, but just an instant. It's sanctification that's the work of a life time, but justification is instantaneous. By faith we believe and ask, and God delivers on His promise immediately.

Years ago when I was in the colporteur work I ran across a lot of people who had no hope, and whenever I had the opportunity I would get out my *Desire of Ages* and read what's on **page 330**, and they always appreciated it. Here's what it says, and I encourage you to memorize it. "Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet."

Do you want hope friend, then follow the council in this last sentence I just read. "Accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme (**and you**) will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet." There are not a dozen different ways to experience the blessed hope, just one. Make the service and honor of God supreme in your life, and the promise is, you will have it.

Turn with me please to **Titus 2:11-14**, "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 Saviour 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."

So, there are conditions to receiving the blessed hope, aren't there? Those who are not willing to give up ungodly living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present world will not receive it. We can't continue to sin and repent and sin and repent for the rest of our lives and expect to experience the blessed hope. We

have to deny the promptings of the fallen flesh and learn to live a life of victory over sin in sinful flesh by partaking of the divine nature and the blessed hope will be ours. Nothing short of this will suffice.

In *The Great Controversy, page 302* it says, “The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour's parting promise upon Olivet, that He would come again, lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim. Amid suffering and persecution, the ‘appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ was the ‘blessed hope.’”

Many Christians today take little thought about the return of Jesus to this earth as He promised He would do. In fact, many ridicule the idea that the end of all things is at hand and that this world as we know it is about to come to a screeching halt. But if we truly have the blessed hope, the return of Christ will be uppermost in our thoughts and we will be doing what we can to prepare ourselves and others for that great day.

And notice again what it says in **verse 14**. It says Jesus “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from **(what?)** all iniquity **(here and now)**, and purify unto himself a peculiar people.” This flies in the face of the new theology of salvation in sin, doesn't it? Christians from all denominations today don't believe that it's possible to stop sinning, or that they will have victory someday, but somehow someday never comes, and if we have this false hope, what's going to happen when Jesus steps out of the Most Holy place and there's no mediator to plead His blood for the sinner? If we don't exchange this false hope for a Blessed hope, the time is soon coming when it will be too late; probation will close and our fate will be sealed for all eternity.

Friends, the blessed hope is something that can happen to us in an instant, just like some of the stories we talked about a few moments ago. Justification by faith is how we receive that blessed hope, and sanctification by faith is how we retain it. One is our title to heaven and the other our fitness for heaven, and we must have both if we would have the blessed hope Jesus offers. If that's what you want I invite you to accept the offer of salvation full and free once again this morning; to once again rededicate and reconsecrate your life to God so that you will be “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” when He comes.