



Dr. Robert A. Cook

Hope That Lives

More than mere
wishing, here is...



“Hope that Lives”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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Somebody says to you, reassuringly, "Don't worry. Everything's going to be all right."

And you respond, "Well, I sure hope so!" Your "hope" -whether it is casual or profound - is a transient thing. It probably has few, if any, deep roots to sustain it.

What I would like to talk to you about is far different from that kind of wishing. The hope I have in mind is linked with the greatest fact of human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead.

If you think this subject is too profound and too distant from daily reality, please stay with me; I think your heart will be cheered and warmed.

I assume you do believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I will not take time to argue the fact that He is alive or to recap the historical events that surrounded His release from the grave. Rather, I would like to look at this matter of our living hope-born of Christ's resurrection -with two questions in view: "Why is this hope important?" and "How does this hope affect my everyday life?"

Hope For The Future

To begin, let us take a long look ahead at what Peter describes as:
"...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

In his delight over this prospect, the apostle exclaims with joy:
"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a LIVING HOPE by the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3).

In other words, if I am "in Christ," then, because Christ lives, I have a glorious future ... I have an inheritance ...I have confidence now even under the pressures of daily life ... and I have something that will be revealed in its completeness only when I am at home with the Lord.

For the Christian to know all this is vitally important.

Still looking toward the future, we need to remember that in raising Jesus from among the dead, God gives us proof of what He will do for all of us who belong to Him through faith in His Son.

Everyone knows about the deteriorating process that is going on in our human bodies though we may not want to talk about it. But we are also linked to Christ, the Living One, and He and we bear a special relation to each other which extends beyond our lifetime.

We read:

“Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

Unless the Lord comes before we die, we will all one day “sleep” in the sense of passing away.

So we ask: What are firstfruits?

As a very young farm boy I was given a tiny plot in which to attempt to raise a few vegetables. I planted the seeds in neat rows and left the seed packet fastened to a stake at the end of each row to indicate what was planted there. The next morning I hurried to the garden to see what had happened overnight! I even dug a little into the earth in an effort to make sure the seeds were sprouting. When I was told that I would have to wait, that was the most unwelcome news this young farmer could hear.

Do you remember your own gardening days? Can you recall the thrill you had when you pulled your first radish from the warm soil? You hurried to the faucet and washed off the sand and popped the little red globe into your mouth and it tasted better than all the others that later grew in that plot. Why? It was the firstfruit. It was proof that a crop could be expected, and it was clear evidence of what kind of crop it would be.

In His resurrection our Lord Jesus is God’s evidence of what He will do. Death could not hold Jesus, and it will likewise be impossible for death to hold us. He had a human body, but His also was one adapted to living eternally in the glory-and one day we shall be like Him in this.

This truth also is important for every Christian to learn.

Hope To Be Shared

I have been reading for my own soul’s sake the early chapters of the Book of the Acts. There we are told that after the Spirit of God was bestowed upon the infant church, people began to speak in languages they had not studied and they were understood by visitors from all over the world who were gathered in Jerusalem.

Some, of course, mocked. But Peter answered them, with great power and effectiveness, linking the utterances of the well-known prophet Joel with the then-present circumstances. He declared:

“This Jesus hath God raised up. . . Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:32, 36, 38).

There you have the basic theme of all. post-resurrection preaching. It was as though the early Christian witnesses were saying: Jesus is alive! Yes, you killed Him, but He is alive forevermore. And if you will repent of your sins and trust in Him, salvation is yours!

That is the only message for sinners, then and now. The Lord Jesus never told us to preach a different one. ‘We probably make our’ presentation far more complex than we need to, in an effort to be innovative and unique.

I know the whole body of Scripture is ours to proclaim and to teach. But when it comes to the sheer life-changing impact that we are to make on the world about us, the crux of the matter is simply this: Jesus Christ is alive!

Over forty years ago Alfred H. Ackley penned the beautiful Easter hymn that begins “I serve a risen Savior, He’s in the world today” and goes on to that triumphant chorus:

*He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today,
He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.*

I ask you: Is He your living Savior? If He is, you have something precious to share. You have hope to dispense.

Hope Fraught With Power

The resurrection of Christ as an historical event is reduplicated in the life of the believer, We too were “dead” (in trespasses and sins); and now we, like Christ, are “alive forevermore.” This truth will stir your whole being once it gets hold of you. You will never be quite the same again. Power - resurrection power - is to be a vital, life - changing, awe - inspiring reality for each of us.

Paul prayed that the Ephesian church might know:

"...what is the exceeding greatness of his [God's] POWER to us who believe according to the working of his mighty POWER which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1:19, 20).

What the apostle is saying is this: I want you to know what this power is in the sense of having a personal experience of it-not just something you have heard of or read about. I want you to realize that God is:

"...able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the POWER that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20).

Paul links hope and power in what he says about "the riches of the glory of this mystery. .. which is Christ in you, the hope of glory," and he indicates that this hope, this power, and this glory have combined to be a motivating force in his dealing with others. Referring to Christ, he says:

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his [God's] working which worketh in me MIGHTILY" (Col. 1:28, 29).

Hope that is vital is joined with resurrection power. And all our relationships with other people will be effective exactly to the extent that the power of the living Christ is at work in our lives.

We have been talking about Hope That Lives-the very words imply resurrection hie. We have looked at the subject: Why is this hope important? Now we come to our second question: how does this hope-this resurrection power-affect everyday existence?

Attitudes Are Changed

Paul put the matter succinctly when he said:

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

When I am possessed of this resurrection power my whole attitude toward life is controlled by Somebody who has moved in and taken command. It is an awesome fact that God has engineered your life and mine with the capability of being controlled by an intelligence other than our own. This may be either for good or ill. Workers in other countries know only too well about demon-possession the manipulation of an individual by a powerful evil force.

Paul says that the unsaved person, the one who has never trusted Christ as Saviour, is under the control of Satan.

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2: 1, 2).

Anybody who is not controlled by God is masterminded by the Evil One. Oh, yes, that individual may have many appealing characteristics; Satan is not in the business of making his subjects look ugly. He is bent upon making people beautiful-without God in their lives - so they can go to hell comfortably.

If you are God's child, your whole general attitude toward life is conditioned by the fact that Jesus is alive, and by His Holy Spirit, is dwelling in you.

This being the case, your perspective toward things will be changed. This was Paul's experience:

“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7,8).

“Things” -how they bother us! Have you ever stopped long enough to enumerate the occasions that upset you, made you (as we say) “lose the victory”? If you have, you probably found that nine times out of ten such occurrences were related to things and to situations that involve things. When trouble struck, you were so bowled over that every thought of eternal values fled your mind. For example:

...You are on your way to a wedding. It's raining. You have your tuxedo on. And you get a flat tire. Do you sing 'There is sunshine in my soul today' ?

...The automatic dryer breaks down and you have to hang the washing outdoors. The sun is shining now, but it rained last night. The ground is wet and slippery. And the clothesline breaks.

Do you begin humming “Blessed Assurance”?

...It is the hottest day of the year, and the refrigerator breaks down. Or it is the coldest day of winter, and the furnace quits. Catastrophes, small or great, seem always to occur at the wrong time-and we are terribly disturbed.

If you will make a list, as we have suggested, of your trouble areas, you probably will come to the realization that very few of them have any eternal consequence.

After all, a million years from now, will it matter whether you drove a Chevrolet or a Cadillac ... or took the bus? Will you be less welcome in heaven if your children, for whom you have paid high tuition for their education, just squeak through their college courses when you wanted them to excel and to bring you praise?

A New Viewpoint Dominates

It takes a powerful force-nothing less than the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit - to reflect orientation with eternal values. Paul experienced that force and that kind of change.

On a less spiritual level, consider a common change of attitude that shows up in many homes. You yourself may have encountered it, if you have a “typical American boy” in your household.

He is hungry all the time. You can’t fill him up. But he refuses to eat food that is good for him. He will not go to bed at a reasonable hour. He lolls in front of the television set endlessly, scorning any kind of schedule.

Then one day he comes home and says, “Ma, what’s for supper?”

You reply, “Roast beef, mashed potatoes and spinach-and I suppose you’ll complain about that!”

But he answers, “No, that’s great. I’ve got to have a lot of lean meat and leafy vegetables.’,

You think he must surely be ill.

“What’s for dessert?” he wants to know. You apologize: “I’m sorry; all I have is fresh fruit.” He answers happily, “That’s OK. I have to have a lot of lean meat and leafy vegetables and fresh fruit.”

Now you know he's ill and suggest calling the doctor.

"No, Mom," he tells you, "you don't understand. I MADE THE TEAM TODAY!"

The restrictions that he would have fought against just twenty-four hours earlier are now embraced with joy and anticipation. His attitude toward these things has changed because of his new commitment to a higher goal.

In like manner, our attitudes change when resurrection power dominates our lives. Things line up then, you may be sure, in terms of their relative unimportance.

Reactions Are Stabilized

Going further, not only are attitudes altered but reaction to stress also is affected by this resurrection power within us.

Here again, Paul is an example. He said:

"None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

When he said "these things," what did he mean? He was on his way to Jerusalem. The Lord was telling him (through people who had the gift of prophecy) that he would be arrested, beaten, imprisoned.

But he said, "None of these things move me." In other words, "I'm not shaken by them." Why?

Jesus is alive! Anyone whose attitude has been changed by resurrection power will find that his reaction to stress also has been changed. Paul again proved that point when he said:

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4: 12).

Paul was experiencing widely varying circumstances-the kind that usually upset us. He said in effect, "Look, the circumstances of my life are all related to the fact that Jesus is alive. Therefore, nothing happens to me that He doesn't allow. Because He is alive and lives within me by His Holy Spirit, I'm held in divine hands, and I can do anything I have to do because He strengthens me."

Can you say that, my friend?

When does this resurrection power show up? If we have it at all, it is demonstrated in those present-day situations in which we can't change the circumstances. It also reaches into the most distant future. That is why Paul could face death without flinching. Hear him say to Timothy:

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth"

"Henceforth" -what does that mean? It means "from this time on," it answers the question, "What does the immediate future hold for me?"

For the apostle, "henceforth" meant that within minutes (or hours or days) he might hear the heavy tread of the executioner's sandals. He might see the flashing of his sword. His head might be severed from his body.

Then henceforth ...

"...there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

You see, the Christian's view of the future is shaped by the closeness (or lack of it) of his relationship with the living Christ. When there is complete abandonment to Him, fear is banished; only joy remains. The "crown" is within reach! The hand that will bestow it is the Savior's hand! What a glorious prospect!

In the meantime, all the vicissitudes of our life are known to Him. He walks with us; we belong to each other.

The story is already in print of an experience I had in India years ago, but I relate it again in order to encourage you to trust our faithful Lord.

On the occasion in question, my traveling companions and I had purchased our tickets and made our reservations with the airline, but someone had failed to put our names on the manifest. So we couldn't get on the plane we wanted out of Calcutta. In those days flights were few, and we had to wait two or three days before we could get on one that landed in London. By that time the rest of our schedule had been cancelled.

I went to the airline office and begged them to -put me on the next flight. They were so polite ... so British ... and so immovable, bless their hearts. "We just can't do that, you know,"

they told me - which was all very proper and right.

I decided to go over to Switzerland and visit with Dr. Frau Wasserzug at the Bible Institute in Beatenburg, which I did.

When I returned to London, the front page of local papers was carrying a story of an airplane crash -and it just happened to be the plane I had tried so hard to get on!

God knows what He is doing! Trust Him. I am so glad to be able to offer you a living hope. It is, as we have seen, the product of Christ's own resurrection power. It will sustain you through all the varied and stressful demands of everyday life. And it will take you right on into eternity!

You can state with confidence, "*My times [all of them] are in Thy hands.*"

