

The Essential of Hope

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn together to Romans chapter 8, Romans chapter 8 and looking particularly at verses 24 and 25. For in this hope we were saved. A hope that is seen is not hope, but who hopes for what he sees?

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. And as we can see very clearly, the subject of these verses is that of hope.

And we're looking at that as the next of the essentials that we've been referring to for a number of weeks now, as we look at some of the doctrines and some of the teaching of the Bible in regard to what we've called essentials with regard to our salvation, particularly.

Many of these essentials, indeed you could almost say all of the essentials that we're looking at are inseparably joined together in certain ways.

For example, the essential of justification that we looked at, where we are accounted righteous by God and his presence, for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, all that is included in that.

[1 : 21] You cannot think of that essential of justification or righteousness without thinking of the essential of faith. Without faith, we don't have that standing.

It's by faith or through faith that we come to possess and come into the possession of that justification. The same with other things that we've looked at, coming to Christ is also bound up with these issues as well.

Or you could say that obedience and holiness, these two are connected with justification and faith as well, but they're connected together themselves.

Holiness is impossible without obedience to Christ, obedience to God as we live in subjection to his will. So all of these essentials, you could say, are in some way or other connected together.

And it's a very interesting exercise in itself just to look at the connections and how they're connected and the different avenues that you're led into as you look at these connections.

[2 : 28] Well, tonight's essential, hope, is also very firmly connected with other essentials that we've looked at or perhaps some we haven't looked at. For example, it is obviously in the Bible connected with faith.

It's really, really in many ways, it's a twin of faith as they are exercised by believers. But it's connected, as you can see here, with such an essential as the resurrection, the resurrection of our bodies.

Hope is connected to these things as it looks forward, as it, if you like, yearns forward.

If you think of hope as having arms or having aspirations, it's forwards that it looks to the future. It reaches and stretches into the future towards those things that are going to form the fulfillment or accomplishment of hope and what it hopes for.

Now, in looking at this passage, in order to try and understand something about this hope and what it is, and what it's connected to, and why it's unessential and why it's important, we need to see something of what he says here about salvation in the larger passage here.

[4 : 03] And the first point that we see the apostles dealing with is the fact that salvation is now owned on the part of those who are God's people in this life, who are justified, who have their sins forgiven, who are right with God.

Salvation is owned by them, but it's not yet complete. It's owned in the sense that they are saved.

They're not evermore going to be unsaved. But their salvation is not yet fully complete and will not be, as we've said, until the body is resurrected at the return of Christ.

The final judgment takes place and then God's people are glorified with Christ forever. So that salvation is now owned, but not yet complete.

And you can see what it says here, what Paul is saying here, moving on from speaking about the whole creation, as it came under the curse of God due to our sin.

[5 : 05] We brought that on the creation. But he says the whole creation was subjected in hope. It's looking forward to the day of the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

This final day of completing their redemption is going to be for the creation, too, a release from what it calls the bondage of corruption, the curse of God in relation to our sin.

And it says not only that, but we ourselves also, we groan towards that particular finishing of our redemption.

For in this hope, we were saved. How do we are saved? What he's saying is that we were saved in the sense that that's something that's already taken place.

It's salvation as now actually owned. You can say it's a present reality. The present stage of our salvation is that we own it. We have forgiveness of sins.

[6 : 06] Those who are right with God, they are justified. They have a right standing with God. And in that salvation is placed by God this hope towards the final stage, the completing stage of their salvation.

That's where things are at, Paul is saying, at the moment. Now, it doesn't mean that we're not yet saved at all in any sense. It doesn't mean that the salvation we have is a somewhat piecemeal thing.

It is a salvation which between ourselves and God, everything is right. But God is still working in us. And there still remains the final phase of our salvation at Christ's return.

And hope is included in what is presently owned. It belongs to salvation as we presently know it and experience it.

As we exercise what you find in the likes of faith and of love, you also exercise hope along with these two.

[7 : 18] The hope that looks forward to the completion of things by God. In other words, hope is an essential ingredient of salvation.

The salvation that you now actually own, that you actually experience, into which God has already taken you. Hope is firmly embedded in that.

You cannot think of, putting it in other terms, in other words, you cannot think of salvation, genuine salvation, as things presently stand, as you experience it in this life, without hope being a part of it. If there is no such thing as hope in it, then we don't have this salvation owned by us. And where you have this hope, then you have salvation already owned, already experienced.

You are already saved, in the sense in which this explains it. I try to think of an illustration, a really simple illustration, in trying to show how essential hope is as an ingredient of salvation, without which you could not say it is genuine salvation.

[8 : 28] Think of a dish, think of some famous classic dish, for example, that's made up of various ingredients. I'm not pretending to have culinary skills, anything like that, but I know what a spaghetti bolognese is.

I know what ingredients go towards making it up. I know that you need spaghetti. I know that you need, well, I don't know if it's spaghetti bolognese, if you use vegetables instead of meat, if you're a vegetarian.

You could probably stretch it to say it's still spaghetti bolognese, but it will not be spaghetti bolognese if it doesn't have tomatoes. It's an essential ingredient.

And if those of you who are skilled in these sort of things, if you think that I'm wrong or if you know that I'm wrong, please tell me afterwards. But I'm fairly sure that without this ingredient, without tomatoes entered into the sauce that makes up the spaghetti bolognese and mixed with the other main ingredients, you don't have a spaghetti bolognese.

You can have something like it. You can have something that resembles it. You can have all the other ingredients and you can color it so that it looks like tomato paste or tomato sauce, but without the tomato, it's not bolognese.

[9 : 44] You can have something that looks like salvation. You can have something that passes itself off as salvation. Without hope, it's not salvation.

It's not salvation possessed. However like salvation it may be, however persuasive the arguments may be, that all the right ingredients are there.

If you don't have this hope that looks forward to the completion of your redemption, that looks forward to the return of Christ, that is itself set on welcoming Christ when he comes and looking forward to your body being resurrected by him so that you will be complete in Christ with a new body as well as everything else.

Without the hope that looks forward expectantly to that, you haven't got salvation, whatever else it may actually seem to be.

That's why it's an ingredient that's essential. That's why it is an essential in terms of belonging to salvation as we presently know it.

[10:51] And you can see from the context here that salvation is incomplete. Look at the end of verse 18 there, where you find the apostle, as we've read there at verse 18, saying, I consider the present sufferings of his present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be or will be revealed in us.

Something that hasn't yet taken place. Verse 19, the end of verse 19, You've got the same emphasis there. The creation was made subject, the creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

That's in the future. That's not yet taken place. It's part of what remains to make the salvation finally complete. Verse 21b, the final part of it as well, the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

What's going to take place at that great moment of Christ's return. And then you have the final part of verse 23 as well there. We wait for the adoption.

And he explains that as not adoption as it's used elsewhere in Paul's letters. Adoption here is much narrower. It's much more confined to the redemption of our bodies.

[12:08] The resurrection, where our bodies will be taken into the final state of salvation. That's to say, the final phase of redemption.

That's all in the future. That's all remaining still to take place. And all of that is connected elsewhere with the return of Christ.

In other words, your hope is directed towards those things not yet accomplished, not yet happened, not yet present with us.

Now, sometimes that means that the word hope is actually used. Slightly complicates things, but Paul sometimes uses the word hope to refer to those things themselves towards which our exercise of hope reaches forward.

Let me give you an example of that in a wonderful passage in his epistle to Titus. But he says, the grace of God, in verse 18, chapter 2, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age.

[13:32] That's where things are at. Waiting for our blessed hope. And then he explains that in the next word saying, the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

You see what he's saying? He's saying, this is the present life, the present age, and in it we're waiting for something. We are hoping towards something. Our hope reaches forward into the future. What's it waiting? It's waiting for the content of our hope, which is what he says here by the word hope. We are waiting for our blessed hope.

The content of the hope we exercise is Jesus Christ, the return of Christ. And that's itself an important thing to remind us of where we are.

And here in verse 24, that's why he's saying here, hope that is seen is not hope. Now there you have the two meanings of the way Paul uses the word as well.

[14:38] When he says the hope that is seen, he means the content of our hope, the return of Christ, the final stage of redemption. It's not yet seen. If it was seen, then our hope in the sense of exercising hope, it would be meaningless.

That's what he's saying. Why do you hope for something that's already taken place? It's with you. It's present. Hope is only meaningful in the context of looking to the future, looking towards things which have not yet taken place.

So there's what he says, first of all, about salvation. It is now owned, but it's not yet complete. And the salvation that's now owned, if you're a Christian, if you're in Christ, if you know the Lord as your Savior, that salvation that you presently own, into which God has taken you, in which you are secure, a vital ingredient of that is hope.

And the hope, that's a vital ingredient of it, is looking forward to the final stage of it, to the final phase of it, at the resurrection, at the return of Christ.

So secondly, hope is now set on the completion of our salvation. We already really anticipated that. [16:06] Hope that is seen is not hope. Hope for who hopes for what he sees. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Now one of the vital things for us is to distinguish this hope from other things that may be called hope, and that could say is, if you like, an ordinary hope.

There's a kind of hope that's really not much better than wishful thinking. A lot of people in the world will hope that things will work out in a certain way for them.

There's no certainty about it. It's wishful thinking. It might not be wrong of people to think of things working out in a certain way in their lives, but they have no absolute certainty at all that that's how things will work out, even though they really would like it to be this way, they would like this outcome, they would like this development, they would like to come into possession of something, they would like their lives, their careers to develop along certain lines, they're wishfully thinking for it, they're hoping in that sense of it, but there's absolutely no guarantee that that will be the way that things will work out.

It's just wishful thinking without certainty. It's not like that with a Christian hope. It's not wishful thinking.

[17:39] It's not hoping, wishing that something will turn out a certain way and not really sure whether or not it will. Everything that God promises is absolutely certain with regard to the completion of our salvation in Christ.

No uncertainty about that. What remains to be completed of your salvation, the return of Christ, the resurrection of your body, it is as absolutely sure and certain as you yourself know yourself to be now as what you already possess of salvation.

Let me try and illustrate that something, trying again to see if we could put that into language that perhaps younger ones can actually follow. I don't know if it's true or not of girls, it's certainly true of most boys I'm sure, that they at some time or other have a dream car that they'd like to own at one time.

Just imagine yourself whatever your dream car is now. And you're going past this garage one of these days and you look into it there it is and it's in pristine condition it's just absolutely shining new and you make inquiries as to whose car this is.

The carriage is locked, you can't get into it, you can see it through the window and you discover that the owner of that car is an invalid. He'll never be able to drive that car again and he gets to know that you're really interested in it, that you're fascinated by it, that this is really your dream car.

[19:27] So he comes to you one day as you're looking in the window and says, would you like to own that? Of course he said, yeah, sure would. Well he says, it's yours and I'll make a document out right now and I'll sign it with my own hand and it'll prove to anyone who asks that this car now belongs to you and giving it to you it's free, it's all paid for, it's yours.

And he gives you the document, he signs it and you can now say, my dream car, I own it. But you look at the bottom of the document and it says there's an additional clause or condition.

You'll get the key to the garage in a year's time. You can't drive this car now because the garage is locked.

The key's inside the car but the garage is locked. You have to wait a whole year before you can drive this dream car that's already owned by you that's legally yours.

But you have to wait till you get in behind the wheel and drive it off. That's I hope something that illustrates where we presently are in this life with our salvation and with the exercise of hope.

[20:52] You own that salvation. God has made it over to you. He signed it over to you. It's become your property. In Christ it belongs to you.

You can't actually experience all its fullness until salvation is completed. The garage doors are open when Christ returns.

Then you get the keys. Then you can drive it. Then you can experience all the reality of what you hope for. Now you just imagine that young man, that young woman, old man, old woman, doesn't matter who it is, looking at that dream car and saying that's really mine.

I actually own that. And as the whole of that year goes on, what's that person doing? They're hoping. They're looking forward to the day when that garage is unlocked, when they have the key.

And the hope that they're exercising is towards the future, towards that day in the future, when this will all really be in their possession. It's owned, but not fully possessed until that time.

[22 : 04] That's what he's saying our hope is like. God has given us this particular salvation. We own it. It's ours. Our name is on it.

His signature is on it. But the present time is a time of waiting, a time of hoping, a time of looking forward to its completion.

And that means not wishful thinking. It means a sureness. Think again of the person with the car. They own the car. How do they know they own the car?

How do they know that this is going to be certain as far as things can be known? Well, they look at the document and say, I see my name on that. And I see the person who gave it over to me, he signed it to me.

You look at your salvation, how do you know it's real? Because it's God's salvation, because Christ died, because Christ already risen from the dead, because God is saying Christ is going to return, because God is saying, I'm going to be you know it's going to happen.

[23 : 08] It's not wishful thinking, so your hope is a certain hope. It doesn't depend on your own ability as a theologian. It doesn't depend on the depth to which you can actually penetrate the meaning of scripture.

It doesn't depend on your experience. It depends on the truth of God's promise. God's promise is always certain, always true.

That's what our hope is based upon. And you see, it's not like worldly hope, not like wishful thinking. It's got a sureness, a certainty, a steadiness to it, that looks forward to something that you know is actually going to happen.

That's what you find in chapter 5 as well, isn't it? Similar language in chapter 5, where there he's been speaking about being justified by faith, another essential, or two other essentials there really, we have peace with God.

Through him we have obtained also access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

[24 : 22] Doesn't finish with that though, he goes on to speak about various things that in the present life we experience so that we produce character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts.

In other words, the hope of the Christian will never be put to shame, will never come to be disappointed. You just imagine the car in the garage, your dream car, untouched, pristine condition, and after your year is over, there you are, you're given the keys, you open the garage doors, are you disappointed?

No, you're thrilled. This is just what you wanted, what you looked forward to. When you come to the final phase of Christ's return, hope will not be put to shame, hope will not be disappointed.

You're not going to say, well, actually, this is not quite as good as I thought it would be, it's going to be a hundred times better than you ever imagined. Your hope is not going to be put to shame.

It's going to prove itself to have been a hope justified and true and certain in relation to God's promises. Now, here's the thing, the tragedy of being unsaved is that you have no hope.

[25 : 53] and that's a tragedy, a tragedy for a human being that does not have hope.

When a human being has been created for communion with God, created to be in fellowship with God, created to know God, created to be in friendship with God, created for being in accompaniment with God through all eternity, we've lost that in the fall, it's been restored by God in Christ, and in order to have this hope back, all that's required of us is to receive Christ as he's offered to us in the gospel, to have the essential of faith, so that Christ becomes ours, so that salvation is possessed as we possess him, and that brings hope into your possession too.

that's why Paul, in writing to the Ephesian church, described what they once were, and how God had dealt with that, they were dead in trespasses and sins, they were like others, the children of wrath like others, under the condemnation of God, remember he says, that at that time you were in the flesh, you were separated from Christ, you were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, you were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, without God in the world.

That's a description of the person who's not saved, that is the great tragedy of being unsaved, of fallen sinners who are not saved in Christ.

They have no hope. There is no greater tragedy than a human being without this hope. It doesn't matter what wishful thinking they may have, it's not hope.

[28 : 10] You only have this hope in Christ. Christ. It's Christ in you, as Paul says elsewhere, the hope of glory is how he describes it.

Now examine your own heart tonight. What are you looking forward to? How do you hope your life will develop?

Look into the future as far as you are able. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring, but we can for sure say this, if I am not saved tonight and I don't see tomorrow, I'm going to be lost forever.

If I don't have a hope of eternal life tonight, if I die like that, that's how I'm going to be forevermore. Having no hope and without God in the world.

Why should you be like that? Why should I be like that? Why should anyone be like that? When God is giving us the opportunity in the gospel of coming to have hope, of placing our confidence in Christ as Savior and coming to have this hope of eternal life.

[29 : 33] What kind of hope? Look into your own heart. Examine your mind, your thinking, what kind of hope, what kind of aspirations, what kind of thing do you think of looking into the future, looking into eternity?

What kind of hope do you have? Is it the Christian hope? Is it the biblical hope? Is it the hope that looks forward to the completion of something you already have in Christ?

if not, where are you? Why are you like that? That's the hope that we must all have as an essential.

And then he goes on finally just this point around things of if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Now patience here is a word that he adds, that really means it has the idea of perseverance in it as well.

Remember perseverance is another essential that we looked at in one of the essentials. But what he's saying he's doing here is interesting. Verses 19, 23, and 25 has a word in Greek which is translated eager longing.

[30 : 51] These two words translate the words in the original text there, eager longing. As part of what a person exercising hope knows and experiences there's an eager longing towards what God promises to do in the future.

But in verse 25 he's added this word patience. He's added the word patience because patience is such an important thing in the context. What is the context?

Well it's one of present sufferings. What he says in verse 18 is what begins the passage. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us.

The present stage of things is marked while there are comforts and joys and highs and also many lows, many sorrows, many testings, many temptations, many tears, many losses, many disappointments, many anxieties, many things which make us fear, make us afraid.

That's what the present life is like for those who have hope as well as everybody else. And it's in that context that hope is so important because hope looks beyond these things, beyond the present.

[32 : 29] Hope looks forward to the time or the stage of things if you like, when all of these things will no longer be with us. And that's why hope is not just as some people would say a refuge for people who just want a way out of the difficulties of life.

They just kind of get embroiled in religion and they pretend there's a glorious future and things feel better. It's not like that. They feel better because there is a better waiting.

And the Christian knows that. And the things of this present world is saying the present sufferings of this present time, they're not worthy to be compared. However great our sufferings might be, we've seen this illustration already and it's really what the Bible often uses, the weight of suffering is what Paul calls it when he was writing to the Corinthians.

the weight of our sufferings, our present afflictions, or this time here our sufferings of the present time. They're not worthy to be compared.

Think of old-fashioned scales. You have weights on one side and you put an equivalent amount of whatever it is on the other side until they're balanced. Well Paul is saying take the weight of your sufferings as a Christian, take all your anxieties, take all the things in this present life that you can actually add together and multiply.

[33 : 59] Take every single thing that the whole span of your present life will contain and has contained already and as much as you can think of may possibly yet be contained until you die.

Put them on one side of the scales. It's a great weight. The scales go right down. and put on the other side the glory that God has already prepared for all who love him.

What happens? The scales actually tip in that direction because that glory far outweighs the whole weight of your sufferings.

Sometimes it may not feel easy to really be convinced that that's the case because suffering does tend to affect our minds and our outlook. But that's the reality of it.

And that's what hope latches on to. And even at the most difficult times the exercise of hope in the promises of God will carry you towards comfort, assurance, finality, things which God has set in the future.

[35 : 19] And that balance is very important between the eager longing or the eagerness and the patience. Being patient is not easy.

And it's important to get the balance because when you get them out of balance, for example, if eagerness overtakes patience, what do you get? Well, you get the kind of Christianity, if you like, that you find in charismatic groups where you'll be taught, God doesn't want you to have pain.

God wants all pain removed from your life, so we have to bring you to a healer. And he's going to deal with you in such a way that will heal your mind and heal your body, and you're going to end up more and more without pain.

It's got to be taken out of your life. That's for the future. That's trying to bring God's future into the present. That's eagerness overtaking patience.

Paul doesn't say, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are wrong, or that God doesn't really want you to experience them at all.

[36 : 38] what he's saying is they're not worthy to be compared to the glory that awaits us. It's a very different thing. You can have the balance tipped the other way as well, or imbalance, where instead of eagerness overtaking patience, you'll find patience actually nullifying or even killing eagerness or excitement.

some people have a wrong idea of patience. That patience is a passive thing, where you just hold up your hands and say, well, what can I do?

That's it. Nothing I can do about this. I'm just going to sit here, let life go by. Some Christians are like that. And people might say of them, well, that person's really patient.

They should say about them is that person's actually quite lazy and even dull. Because a Christian should not be lethargic, just letting life go by as if that's patience.

Patience is an active thing. Patience is an active waiting upon God for his time, for his timetable.

Patience is a putting up with things, not just for the sake of it, but because you know that that's what God wants you to do.

[38 : 06] Patience is an acceptance of God's way of doing things, not ours. So you see, there's the balance. You can't lose the eagerness or the patience, but they both exist together when you think about hope.

Hope is an eager longing with patience. And we all come short and all at some time or other get things out of balance.

But Paul is saying this is the balance that God presents that we should aim at. The eagerness that really wants to do things for God, that really looks forward eagerly to the future, but doesn't try to bring it into the present by our own efforts.

And the patience that puts up with sufferings and faith and quiet acceptance of God's will. That's Christianity.

That's what the Bible defines as Christianity. Living for the future, living for glory, living for what God has prepared for us, living by hope. This Christian hope, this certain hope, it's what marked the early church.

[39 : 24] I don't have time to go into it, but I'm going to refer to Colossians chapter 3. Just read it for yourselves later on, please, when you get home. And what you'll find in Colossians chapter 3 is that this is exactly how the early church lived in the time of the apostles, with this hope, looking forward to this great future that God had for his people.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth.

For you have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. That's your hope, he's saying.

Set your affection on those things that are above. Does that make you useless in this life? No. Does it make you put off things like living in a way that wants to be holy and practically of use?

No, because Paul goes on to say, therefore, put to death what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire.

[40 : 32] What is this saying to us? Well, it's saying this. Paul begins with what we are in Christ. You died, your life is hidden with Christ, you're in him.

And alongside that, he puts at the beginning of things what you're going to be. what will be when Christ appears. And it's from these two things together that you get the motivation and the energy to deal with your sin, to put to death the deeds of the body.

And the more you live in hope, the more your hope is exercised, the more holy your life will be. too. That's another connection.

This is how C.S. Lewis put it in one of his writings. Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not, as some people think, a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things that Christian is meant to do.

It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.

[42 : 03] And that's a reality. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the hope that you plant in our hearts for the reality of those things to which our hope is attached, for those great things that are promised in the future that awaits your people in glory.

We thank you, Lord, tonight that they are all true, that they are certain, that they are laid in store for those whose hope is in you. We give thanks for all that accompanies our hope in this life.

We give thanks for faith as that means by which we are attached to our Savior. We give thanks for the love that you create in our hearts for you and for your people and even for others too.

We pray, Lord, that you would help us as we think upon those essential things, to have them for ourselves, to exercise them, to prize them, to commend them to others.

Hear us now, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.