

The Christian's Living Hope

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me in your Bibles, if you have one before you, to these verses in the book of Revelation that I read a little time ago in our service this evening.

I wonder if you have ever reflected at any length on the way the Apostle Paul describes the Lord Jesus Christ in the latter verses of 1 Corinthians 15.

He describes him as the last Adam and as the second man. Clearly Paul has in his mind the Garden of Eden.

Adam was God's first man. Adam was the covenant head, the appointed head of humanity. Adam stood for all who were in the purposes of God attached to him.

But Adam fell. He failed miserably and tragically and in his fall he brought the whole of humanity crashing down with him.

[1 : 15] And then in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul insightfully speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's last Adam and second man.

What Paul wants us to do is to understand that when Jesus Christ came into the world he didn't come as a private individual. He came as the better than Adam.

He came as the head of a new humanity. He came to succeed where Adam had failed. And in Revelation 21 and into 22 we are shown something of the consummating climax of the triumph of the last Adam and the second man.

Because there is no other Adam and no other man after Jesus Christ. There are but two men if you like. In the whole of humanity there was the first Adam and there was the last Adam.

And we are either tonight joined to that first Adam who failed or we are united to that second Adam who triumphed. And it is the triumph of the last Adam that John is portraying for us here in these opening verses of Revelation 21.

[2 : 48] The Lord Jesus Christ did not simply come into the world to rescue individual men, women, boys and girls from a lost and a damned eternity.

He did not simply come to pluck us from the burning. He did not simply come to rescue us from the dominion of darkness and bring us into the kingdom of God.

He came to save a people to God's praise. He came to make a new heavens and a new earth the home of righteousness.

As the Apostle Peter puts it in his second letter. There is something cosmic about the triumph of the crucified.

In his first letter I think in the third verse of the first chapter Peter describes the Christian hope as a living hope.

[3 : 48] He says we have been born again, born anew to a living hope. And I want to use that phrase as a lens into through which we can look at what John writes in these opening verses.

What is the Christian's living hope? He calls it a living hope to distinguish it from all other hopes that die at death.

Every unbeliever has hopes. But every single one of them die with him or with her at death. But the Christian has a living hope.

A hope that lives, as Peter tells us, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Christian's hope is alive and well.

Because it is founded upon a saviour who is alive and well. So look with me at these verses. Remembering as we do so that John is not writing a theology of the end times.

[4 : 59] He's writing to comfort and encourage weary, hard-pressed, suffering Christian believers. Rome was the great world empire of that day.

And Caesar was the one voice that counted in that empire. The Latins had a phrase for it. Caesar, ipse, dixit.

Caesar has spoken. And when Caesar speaks, you bow down and take notice. But Christians didn't take notice.

Because there was another Lord superior to Caesar. Jesus, ipse, dixit.

Jesus has spoken. Christians were the ultimate non-conformists. They didn't try. They didn't go out of their way to be difficult and cross-grained. But their allegiance was not first to Caesar.

[6 : 00] But to Jesus Christ, the Lord, the risen Lord and King. And we can see the relevance of that for us today. We live in a society that passes laws and presses legislation upon us that is ungodly and unholy.

We are called to respect and to give obedience to those set over us by the Lord in society. But when there is a conflict between the dictates of society and the commands of God, we must obey God rather than man.

No matter what the consequences. Now these early Christians, for them, the consequences were not a little bit of name-calling. Oh, you Christians, you're extremists.

You're narrow-minded. You live in the past. These Christians knew that if they didn't conform to the way things were, they could be thrown to the lions.

They could be tied to the stakes of Rome, covered in oil and burned to light the streets of Rome. That's what happened to some Christians.

[7 : 10] So John is writing a pastoral letter to say, Brothers and sisters in Christ, be encouraged. Hold fast.

Jesus Christ has triumphed. There are five things in these verses I want to notice very simply with you this evening.

What then is the living hope that is the possession of every Christian believer? Not the mature believer. Not the well-taught believer.

But the believer, the youngest believer. Maybe you came to faith this morning. Maybe the Lord brought you to himself two moments ago. This living hope is as much your possession as it is my brothers here or mine or the Apostle Paul's.

If you're in Christ, you have this living hope. Number one, it is the hope of cosmic renewal. Look what John tells us then.

[8 : 17] After that is after the events of chapter 20. The final casting of Satan and all who bear his mark. The mark of fallen humanity into the everlasting fire.

Then I saw what? A new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. What was it John is privileged to see?

A whole new cosmos purged of sin. The first creation fell with Adam.

And the whole creation, Romans 8 verse 18, groans in travail together till now. We live in a world groaning because of sin.

Sin has permeated the very vitals of the cosmos. But God's ultimate purpose is not to bear forever with this fallen sin marked cosmos.

[9 : 25] But to make a new heaven and a new earth. And the mention of the sea, the sea was no more. And there are perhaps two elements here in the Old Testament.

The sea was often pictured as the place where evil ruled. Sea was uncertain and turbulent. They didn't have the maritime know-how that we have today.

And the sea was often that place of uncertainty. Where there were convulsions. But no more. No more.

And the sea is also the place that divides nations, isn't it? Continents and nations are divided by sea. There will be no more division. God is going to make a new heavens and a new earth, 2 Peter 3.

The home of righteousness. The Christian hope involves the renewal of the cosmos. It's as grand as that. It's as big as that.

[10 : 23] I don't know much about science. My interests were in other areas. But physics has always interested me and even fascinated me.

I read recently the new biography of Stephen Hawking. I used to see him in Cambridge going about in his motorised wheelchair. I think he's profoundly wrong. But what a mind he has.

And when you think of the star systems, the billions and uncountable trillions of stars, your mind begins to reel.

And then you remember this. One of the most stunning verses in the whole Bible. Genesis 1. And God also made the stars.

The Hebrew is very punctured and punctuated and brief. Also the stars. It's almost as if, well, okay, trillions of stars.

[11 : 27] Boom. He spoke them into being. He spoke the cosmos into being. Now he is going to recreate the cosmos. And the glory of that new creation is going to be Jesus Christ.

Writing to the Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 1. Again, one of these magnificent verses in the Bible. We're told that God's plan for the fullness of time was to unite all things in Christ.

Things in heaven and things on earth. The creation rebelled against God and Adam. But in God's better than Adam, his last Adam and second man, God is going to reconstitute creation.

And Jesus Christ will be the epicenter. The head of that new creation. That's why it's so vital that Jesus Christ be our head now.

That he might be our head then. So it's the hope of cosmic renewal. The hope of a new creation. But secondly, it's the hope of personal transformation.

[12 : 35] Look how John goes on. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride.

Notice the word adorned for her husband. Why did Jesus Christ come into the world?

Well, he came to effect a cosmic renewal. But at the heart of that cosmic renewal, he had come to find a bride and to make her pure and holy.

Jerusalem was the place of God's special dwelling. The heaven of heavens cannot contain him, but he was pleased that his nearer presence should reside in the city of his choice.

But now the holy city is the people of God. And all who have come to faith in Jesus Christ belong to his bride. That's why it's so imperative that Christians behave in a brotherly and sisterly way, one to the other, because we are the one bride of Christ.

[13 : 43] That's why unity is such a precious thing, precious to God. And so Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 5, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

John sees a bride coming down, adorned for her husband. Is there a day that you do not grieve and weep over your sin?

As a Christian, is there a day you do not look at yourself and bewail before God that with all your privileges you sin so easily and lightly?

One day the Lord Jesus Christ is going to banish every blemish from our lives. Indwelling sin will be no more to trouble us.

Every sin that once touched our lives, humbled us, will be banished forever from us. We will be perfectly adorned.

[15 : 10] I'm often asked by people, do you think we'll recognize each other in heaven? Well, I think we will because God made us the way he made us.

But I sometimes say, just to test the waters, I'm not sure. I will be so beautiful, you'll never recognize me.

You'll say, you're not Ian Hamilton. I am. No, no, no, you're not. I knew what you were like. But God and his son Jesus Christ has banished every blemish from my life.

It's the hope of personal transformation. The hope that one day we will no longer be captive to those temptations and sins that can dog our lives and that can mar our communion with God and with one another.

the hope of personal transformation. We will be adorned. But then thirdly, it is the hope of being forever with the Lord.

[16 : 22] Verse 3, And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold. Now that word behold has particular force in Greek. It means now listen up. Consider this well.

Behold. Behold. Behold. The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

Here is the consummation of the great promise of God to Abraham. Genesis 17. I will be your God and you will be my people. It's the golden thread that runs through the whole Bible and that unites Old and New Testaments because God is the same God.

The heart of the Christian hope is being forever with the Lord. Now I know that part of the Christian hope is that we shall be with those who love the Lord and whom we loved in this life.

There will be a glorious reunion, won't there? We shall together, as Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 4, we shall together be with the Lord.

[17 : 37] But the glory of heaven is not our reunion with one another. The glory of heaven is that God will in all his fullness be our God and we will be his people.

He will dwell in the midst of us. Samuel Rutherford was right. The Lamb is all the glory in Emmanuel's land. The Lamb is all the glory in Emmanuel's land.

Let me ask you a simple question tonight. If you are a Christian, what are you looking forward to in heaven? I sometimes meander in my head.

I sometimes think if people knew the meanderings in my head, they'd never invite me to preach anywhere. But I sometimes think, you know, I would love to just spend time with John Calvin. He's my great Christian hero.

But I have a fear that when I see Brother Calvin and I say, Brother Calvin, can I speak with you? I think he's bound to say, I'm too busy admiring my Redeemer. I'll say, well, when you've a little time, I'll never have time.

[18 : 52] I will always be admiring my Redeemer. It's the hope of being forever with the Lord. That's the heart of the Christian hope.

That's why in the Song of Songs, the bride can say, you're the fairest of 10,000. There's nobody like you. You are the best of the best.

If it wasn't so ungrammatical, I would say, Lord Jesus, you're the bestest. But then, fourthly, it's the hope of no more tears.

I doubt there is a more beautiful, encouraging verse than verse 4 in the whole Bible. He, He, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. We live in a veil of tears.

[20 : 00] We live in a fallen world, in fallen bodies. tears are never far from us. We weep over our own sins and inconsistencies and failures.

We weep over those of others. We weep over children who seem distant and far from God.

We weep over the travails that touch our world and that touch our lives. But there will come a day when every tear will be wiped away.

But notice this, He, He will wipe away every tear. How He will do that is this side of glory, perhaps a mystery to us.

But I, I know for myself, I, maybe rightly or wrongly, you can judge. I sometimes think the Lord will do it individually. How He will do that.

[21 : 08] Because we matter individually to Him. We're not saved in the mass. We're saved as individuals. Because God made us individually in His image, after His likeness.

Salvation is idiosyncratic and salvation in its fullness will be idiosyncratic. God will wipe away individually every tear from our eyes. No more tears, son.

The former things have passed away. No more tears. It's a breathtaking promise.

It's a breathtaking picture. There'll be no crying, no mourning, no pain, no death.

The former things will have passed away. God will make all things new. And in that new heavens and in that new earth, there will be unalloyed joy, unblemished bliss.

[22 : 14] never a sad moment, never a tearful moment, just joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But then fifthly, notice this just as we draw to a close. This hope, this living hope is the possession of those who conquer, who conquer.

Look down at verse 7. The one who conquers will have this heritage. And I will be his God and he will be my son.

You see, John knows that these Christians to whom he is writing are suffering greatly. He knows that some of them already have turned back. The letter to the Hebrews, for example, was written because Christians were suffering greatly.

They were being dispossessed. They were being ostracised and some were saying, this is too hard, this is too hard. We need to turn back to Judaism and escape the pressures and the trials and the troubles that are just grinding us into the dust.

[23 : 26] And the letter to the Hebrews is written to say, go on, go on, go on, don't turn back, there is nothing for you turning back, go on.

and John is reminding his readers scattered, no doubt, throughout Asia Minor under the Roman yoke that it is those who endure to the end who will be saved.

You see, when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are united to the Jesus who endured to the end. and one of the marks of saving faith, of authentic faith, is that it goes on.

It goes on. It may stumble, it may fall, but it goes on. It goes on. And John wants these believers to know that this glorious inheritance, this marvelous living hope, is not the possession of those who likely commit their lives to Jesus Christ, but it belongs to those for whom Jesus Christ is their life.

the one who conquers will have this heritage. Now, here's the thing. We cannot conquer and overcome and persevere to the end in our own strength.

[24 : 58] We are more than conquerors, Romans 8, 37. We're more than conquerors through him who loved us. Or Paul's words in Philippians 4, I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

In our own strength we would crumble and fail and fall. That's why every day we need to come to the Lord and say, Lord, grant me the grace today to be faithful.

Help me today, Lord, to stand fast for my Saviour. That's why Paul tells the Corinthians, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

The danger is we become complacent. We think I've done well for the last five years, ten years, fifty years. If we are to enter this inheritance, we need to be among those who conquer, who go on, who don't cave in to the pressures of the world, who refuse to be styled and shaped by what governments say, if those governments speak contrary to the word of God.

Authentic Christian faith is a faith that goes on. God says, you know, that's easy to say. And I'm very conscious it's easy to preach in a sense, although I trust I preach first to myself before to you.

[26 : 44] But I know Christians in some parts of this world who when they hear that are saying to themselves, God is saying to me, be ready to die.

Believers in Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Iran, you preach that word and they hear it and they say, am I ready to die?

Is the Lord Jesus Christ worth that? So we have a living hope, a hope that nothing and no one can take from us because it's a hope grounded in Jesus Christ who has conquered.

And that's why we need to prize every opportunity to sit under the means of grace and church. I think probably I've mentioned to you before, in Calvin's Geneva in the 1550s, there were about 8 to 10 opportunities for public worship every week.

You think, well that's a bit excessive. Did they not work? Well they did, but they got up early and they had services at 6 o'clock till 7 o'clock and they go off to work and they have services at night.

[28 : 13] You think, well, did they have time for anything else? I didn't live then, I don't really know. You say, well, why did they have all these services? Because they believed this, that you needed such opportunities from God to resist the diet of false illusions that this world gives.

We need every opportunity to hear God's word and to have it sink into the marrow of our souls so that we can combat the insidious, vain, false illusions that this world is bombarding us with.

So my friends, prize every opportunity to sit under the word. Don't neglect family worship, absolutely not.

Don't neglect private devotions, absolutely not. God's principle means for nurturing us, building us up, establishing us and equipping us to go on and conquer is the public worship on the Lord's day of his people.

may God give us a greater sense of the living hope that he is prepared for those who love him and for those who in Christ will go on and conquer.

[29 : 45] May God bless to us his word.