

## Theological Background

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The Christian understanding of hope illustrates how trivial our everyday use of the word can be. We hope that it will not rain for the picnic, or that the car will start or that the plumber will come tomorrow.

At a deeper level, hope is a universal human phenomenon. People hope for peace in time of war; food in time of famine; justice in time of oppression. Where hope is lost there is despair and disintegration. Hope generates energy and sustains people through difficult times. For some people, hope is so strong that it inspires self-sacrifice to turn hope into reality.

True hope is much more than a general idea that things will get better. It is more than a belief in progress, which sees the world and people as getting better all the time, growing away from violence, ignorance and confusion. There has, of course, been genuine progress: in technology, in communications, in medical care and in the protection of people's rights through the law. Nevertheless, terror and oppression, death and disease, greed and self-serving still govern the lives of millions. In the light of all this, belief in human progress looks facile and deluding.

Christian hope is grounded in the character of God. Often, in the Psalms, the writer says to God: 'My hope is in you'. It is a hope rooted in the love and faithfulness of God. Hope is not wishful thinking but a firm assurance that God can be relied upon. It does not remove the need for 'waiting upon the Lord' but there is underlying confidence that God is a 'strong rock' and one whose promises can be trusted. The writer to the Hebrews describes the Christian hope as 'an anchor for the soul, firm and secure'. Even when experiencing exile, persecution, doubt or darkness, the Biblical writers trust in God's 'unfailing love' and know that he will be true to his covenant promises. That is the basis of their hope.

Hope is not always spontaneous or easy. There is work to be done. As well as trusting God, we have to develop qualities of steadfastness in our own character.

Paul says: 'We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.' (Romans 5:3-4)

Hope is coupled with faith and love as one of the three most enduring gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 13:13).

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Christian hope for the future has its guarantee in the resurrection of Jesus. The prophets always spoke of a time to come when the whole world would be restored to God. For Christians, Jesus' death and resurrection has set this in motion.

Christian hope means trusting in the loving purposes of God: trusting that the foundations of the world are good because they spring from God. It means believing that, ultimately, we are destined to share in that goodness because of what Jesus has done. He had to pass through the 'valley of the shadow of death' but the victory has been won and our share in that victory is assured.

### **Biblical References**

Psalm 62:5-8

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Psalm 130:5-6

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

1 Peter 1:3-4

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you.