



## Hope

Two ninety year old men, Bill & Fred, have been friends all their lives. It seems that Bill is dying, so Fred comes to visit him. "Bill," says Fred, "You know how we have both loved cricket all our lives. Bill, you have do me one favour. When you go, somehow you've got to tell me if there's cricket in heaven." Bill looks up at Fred from his deathbed and says, "Fred, you've been my friend many years. This favour I'll do for you." And with that, Bill passes on. It is midnight a couple nights later. Fred is sound asleep when a distant voice calls out to him, "Fred... Fred..." "Who is it?" says Fred sitting up suddenly. "Who is it?" "Fred, its Bill." "Come on. You're not Bill. Bill died." "I'm telling you," insists the voice. "It's me, Bill!" "Bill? Is that you? Where are you?" "I'm in heaven," says Bill, "and I've got to tell you, I've got some good news and some bad news." "Tell me the good news first," says Fred. "The good news," says Bill "is that there is cricket in heaven." "Really?" says Fred, "That's wonderful! What's the bad news?" "You're in our team for your bowling skills next Tuesday!"

Well I think I have shared before that I am a member of Essex County Cricket Club. In the summer season, I love to go down to the county ground in Essex and watch some cricket. I particularly like the 4 day county game.

This morning I want us to look at the word *hope* that occurs in the Bible. But having started with a cricket joke, let's think about how we use the word hope today.

I hope that Essex County Cricket Club will be promoted from the second division to the first division of the first class counties. But that is almost wishful thinking, particularly with their weak bowling line up. When I do go to watch a game this summer, I hope it won't rain, but that it will be a nice sunny day. But this use of the word hope, is something I would like to happen but there is often very little certainty about it.




However, this morning I want to look at the word hope as we find it in the Bible where it is a much stronger word than in its use in current English. A Bible Dictionary defines hope as:

*Trustful expectation, particularly with reference to the fulfilment of God's promises. Biblical hope is the anticipation of a favourable outcome under God's guidance. More specifically, hope is the confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what God will do in the future. This contrasts to the world's definition of hope as "a feeling that what is wanted will happen."*

Notice that it says that it is the anticipation of a favourable outcome under God's guidance. The main word used for hope in the NT is the Greek word *elpizo*. But the other meaning of the word is expectation and we may get much more understanding by thinking about this meaning of the word, in its Biblical aspect. So let's think about the expectation that the Bible leads us to belief in and reach out for.



There are 3 aspects to hope or expectation that I want us to look at this morning. These are:

-  Expectation rests on the character of God
-  Expectation is tied up with God's purposes and plans
-  Expectation is empowered by the Holy Spirit

### Expectation rests on the character of God

So let's first see that hope or expectation for us as Christians from its Biblical perspective rests on the character of God

Right near the start of the Bible we see that God makes a promise to Abraham and Sarah. We find this in Genesis chapter 17. And I am going to read some of this from the modern translation called The Message:

*"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God showed up and said to him, "I am The Strong God, live entirely before me, live to the hilt! I'll make a covenant between us and I'll give you a huge family." Overwhelmed, Abram fell flat on his face. Then God said to him, "This is my covenant with you: You'll be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, meaning that 'I'm making you the father of many nations.' I'll make you a father of fathers—I'll make nations from you, kings will issue from you. And I'm giving you and your descendants this land where you're now just camping, this whole country of Canaan, to own forever. And I'll be their God." God continued speaking to Abraham, "And Sarai your wife: Don't call her Sarai any longer; call her Sarah. I'll bless her—yes! I'll give you a son by her! Oh, how I'll bless her! Nations will come from her; kings of nations will come from her." Abraham fell flat on his face. And then he laughed, thinking, "Can a hundred-year-old man father a son? And can Sarah, at ninety years, have a baby?"* Genesis 17(The Message) verses 1-17 (in brief)

So God promises to Abraham & Sarah that they will have a son. Not only this, but that through this son not only will the nation of Israel be blessed, but all nations will also be blessed. That blessing is the one that reaches us.

But notice Abraham's reaction, he laughs almost at God, and says can I a hundred year old man father a son? So he is looking with human eyes and not with expectation that comes from God himself. Don't we so often look at things around and have no hope or expectation? But it is God that is promising them this son. So we need to see that this expectation of a son rested on God, not their human position. And didn't God fulfil this, abundantly. For through Abraham, and Israel comes Jesus, the messiah of Israel and the saviour of all people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 4:10



Our expectations should always rest on God. For he is faithful and trustworthy.

In Samuel we read that David declares the following:

*For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God?*

2 Samuel 22:32 (NIVUK)

And we know that Jesus is foundation stone, in effect the true stone or rock on which the church is built. No wonder we sing in one hymn:

On Christ the solid Rock I stand,  
All other ground is sinking sand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.

So just as our lives are resting on the solid rock of Jesus himself, so all the hopes and expectation we have in him, rest upon his nature and character. Paul writes:

*But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not Yes and No, but in him it has always been Yes. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are Yes in Christ. And so through him the Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 1:18-22 (NIVUK)

Let me just read a very simple poem that expresses this sense of resting upon God:

Said the robin to the sparrow,  
'I should really like to know  
Why these busy human people  
Seem to fret and worry so.'  
Said the sparrow to the robin  
'Friend I think it must be  
That they have no heavenly Father  
Such as cares for you and me.'

Anon<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From 'Celtic Daily Light' compiled by Ray Simpson for 26 Feb



## Expectation is tied up with God's purposes and plans

But if our hopes or expectations rest on the character of God, they are also tied up with his purposes and plans. Although we have to be careful that our selfish or self-centred desires are not confused with our plans that are in him. Jesus himself said

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* Matthew 6:33 (NIVUK)

In our society today, too many people, even some in the church are seeking their own satisfaction and desires first. Where as Jesus tells us to seek his kingdom first. In a nutshell that is set out in the way that Jesus summed up God's rules or commandments. For Jesus said:

*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* Matthew 22: 37 - 40 (NIVUK)

So if we are truly centred on Jesus and walking with him, then if we ask or seek for things in his light, then we don't need to have wishful thinking of the I hope so type. But rather we have expectation that not only rests on his character, but will be part of his overall plans.

What is God's overall plan? Well it is a rescue plan for his creation, and that includes all people. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and bring sin into the world, God was not taken by surprise. He already had a rescue or restoration plan in mind. We need to remember some of the bad things that entered into the creation at the fall. Death entered into the world. We were not meant to physically die in the original unspoilt creation. The one absolute certainty now is that we will die. It also meant that we died spiritually and now no longer have an automatic and close relationship to God. And creation was marred and spoilt through this act of disobedience.

But God sent his only son Jesus to die on the cross and to rise again. This was to bring about eventually the restoration of his creation. And to rescue us who were lost and dying. Now in Jesus we have life and we will live for evermore. But remember this life doesn't start when we die and go to heaven. It starts right here and now in this life. It is entering the Kingdom of God and finding life. After all Jesus said:

*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

John 10:10b (NKJV)

So we need to take our eyes off our own needs and see what God is achieving for all of us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. But when we enter into this, he gives us life and life in all its fullness or abundance. This means that much of the time our plans will be part of his overall plan and we will experience and see the expectations met in him.



But we need to remember if we ask for things and expect to see us receive them we need to ask correctly for James reminds us:

*When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.* James 4:3 (NIVUK)

So maybe don't ask God for a Rolls Royce car, but a family saloon that will meet your needs and still mean you can give others lifts.

### Expectation is empowered by the Holy Spirit

So we have seen that our hope or expectation rests on the character of God and that it is tied up with his purposes and plans. But the third thing we need to remember is that God's hope or expectation is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8 that great chapter Paul says:

*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.* Romans 8:11 (NIVUK)

Remember that it was the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from death to life in the resurrection. The Father raised his son through his Spirit. And Paul says that this same Spirit lives in us. The NT often uses the word power when talking about the work of the Holy Spirit.

The main word used for power in the NT is the Greek word *dunamis*. So the describing the power of God would use this word, it most places. But if we want to be absolutely correct Jesus is seated at the right hand of father. The person who is at work in our world and in our lives is the person of the Holy Spirit. Some Christians believe that the reason Jesus could work miracles was because he was the son of God. However, at the start of Philippians chapter 2 we read:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

It is important to remember that Jesus didn't lose his divine position as the son of God. But he lived as a man in the power of the Holy Spirit. The reason he could work miracles, particularly of healing, was that he listened to his Father and did what the Father told him to do. **But it was the power of the Holy Spirit in him and flowing through him that brought about the healings or miracles.** That same power is in us, if we are in Christ as Paul would say.



If you have been born again or more accurately as the Bible says born from above, then you have the Holy Spirit in you. Paul in Romans 8 says you cannot be a Christian and not have the Spirit within you. Although why so many Christians fail to move in the power of the Holy Spirit is another matter. And the word dunamis is effectively the same root from which we get the English word dynamite. So remember this power is in us and should be in the church

It is this power that God will use to achieve his purposes, primarily through us as individuals and as a group of followers of Jesus. For we need to remember the church is just a bunch of ordinary people who are following Jesus as their saviour and Lord. And we have the power of his Spirit with us. So God can achieve his purposes. His hope and expectations that should be our hopes can be achieved as we allow God to flow through us.

So we have seen that hope or expectation in Biblical terms rests on the character of God. That it is tied up with God's purposes and plans. And finally that it is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

But let's just think about putting this in to practice. So often Paul when writing his letters to the early church starts with teaching the faith. But then towards the end of the letter he will get down to practical matters. James letter is very practical as to how we should live as Christians.

One of the problems with us is that we are human. We tend to look at things with a human view point. Let's not pretend that all is well with our churches in the UK. Many churches have been loosing their congregations in a fairly big way. Some more than others. I read the following in the a publication recently that:

### Church going in rural England has fallen by one third since 1989

It is so easy to look at this and loose heart. But Jesus is the head of the church. It is his church. And as we have seen hope or expectation rests on God. It is perfectly possible that God could bring a renewal or revival to our churches. But we will need to stand on our understanding that it rests on his character. Also we need to allow the Holy Spirit to empower all we do. There is often reluctance amongst some traditional churches to allow much room for the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this is because they have seen some of the excesses or lack of love amongst charismatic Christians. The other big factor is that people don't like change. None of us does. But often in our churches we cling onto the way we have always done it. When I first became a Christian I worshiped in an Anglican church. And we used to say:

### As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen

I was in my teens at the time and remember thinking I will be using the Tudor English of the 1662 BCP when I am in my old age. Thankfully the liturgy has been modernised. But it is not just language that needs changing.



Jesus said:

*Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."*

Matthew 9:17 (NIV)

He was talking about the new wine of the kingdom of God, against the background of the way the Jewish authorities were not moving into this. But it still applies.

I go to many URC churches in and around Chelmsford. In one of them like many URC churches the congregation is getting smaller. Down the road is a free evangelical church that has enlarged it's building at least once. It has lots of young people. It's music will be lively and modern, and probably loud at times. But one of the significant members of the URC church whilst admitting that the free church was lively and growing, did not want that sort of music in his church. It is any wonder that young people particularly teenagers are not attracted if all we do is play 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century hymns. Many of these are brilliant. I have been present when about 5,000 people sang Praise my soul the king of heaven, lead by a band. It made the hairs on the back of my head almost stand on end.

It is possible to see our churches revive and grow. But we do need to gain hope or expectation that is Biblical and rests on God's character. We also need to be filled and open to the Holy Spirit. We can always begin in small ways to reach out the community whether it is a coffee morning once a week or some other venture.

***So let's fix our eyes on Jesus and let his Spirit fill us with expectation that comes from God.***<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Words 3156