

“Hope in a Hopeless World”
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1. Hopelessness

The current scene in Myanmar involves a military insurrection, families fleeing to the woods, murder, and suffering from Covid-19 without any resources. Children, adults, and elderly have suffered greatly along the way.

In Afghanistan, perhaps you remember the video of a flight taking off with people hanging on the sides, only to fall off to their deaths from hundreds of feet in the air.

Here in America, people still regularly recall (for better or worse) how an angry mob of people stormed our capital building on January 6, 2020. Covid-19 spread in December of 2019 and continues to disrupt our way of life. Our government and politics seem to become more corrupt and volatile by the day. Inflation is at 7%. And don't forget the annual tornadoes, hurricanes, forest fires, and damage left behind.

From a personal point of view, I've met with many people in Rockford to process how deal with someone's murder, suicide, overdose, or unexpected death. The last two men I saw taken by the coroner were under 30 years old.

“Present hurts and uncertainty over what the future holds create the constant need for hope. Worldwide poverty, hunger, disease, and human potential to generate terror and destruction create a longing for something better. Historically people have looked to the future with a mixture of longing and fear. Many have concluded that there is no reasonable basis for hope and therefore to hope is to live with an illusion.”¹

Is there really no hope? And just what exactly is hope in the first place?

¹ Paul K. McAlister, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v., “Hope,” 1:997.

2. What Is Hope?

Here are some dictionary definitions of *hope*:

- Merriam-Webster: “to want something to happen or be true and think that it could happen or be true”²
- Dictionary.com: “the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best”³
- Cambridge: “to want something to happen or to be true, and usually have a good reason to think that it might”⁴
- *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*: “To trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future”⁵
- *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* “A concept involving trustful anticipation”⁶

For all of the above, there are notions of...

- something future (it has not happened yet),
- personal desire (wanting it to happen),
- and something of having more certainty than not (it could, the feeling... that events will, usually have a good reason to think).

Hope can be good, but hope can also be false.

3. False Hopes

Some people remember the dead and memorialize their lives in some way. They look back but know nothing of how to move forward.

For recovering our health and economy or the loss from natural disasters, people hope in vaccines or voting in new politicians who might just govern money back into their pockets and streets and buildings back to their towns.

Some people hope to escape their problems through endless hours their favorite shows. Some people turn to drugs and alcohol to find immediate sensations of pleasure.

Some people hope to create ways of life that will sustain the planet in such a way that mankind will go on forever.

But in the end, history tells us that there have always been problems, death, and suffering. Hope in immediate or long-term solutions made by men will always leave us wanting.

² Online: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hope>. Accessed Jan 19, 2022.

³ Online: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hope>. Accessed Jan 19, 2022.

⁴ Online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/hope>. Accessed Jan 19, 2022.

⁵ William B. Nelson, Jr., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s.v., “Hope,” 355.

⁶ E.F. Harrison, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v., “Hope,” 2:751. In terms of Scripture, Harrison adds that this definition is “particularly with reference to the fulfillment of the promises of God.”

Can we place our hope in something or someone else? What might the Bible say about hope?

4. The Bible warns us against false hope.⁷

The Bible warns us against putting our hope in **people** (Jer 17:5–8; Mic 7:3–5; Ps 118:9; 143:3–7). Whether princes, great men, neighbors, friends, spouses, children, or parents—people will often dash what hopes we had in them.

The Bible warns us against putting our hope in **riches** (Job 31:24–28; Ps 52:1–7; Prov 11:28). They will perish with us in the end (Job 1:21; Ecc 5:15; Luke 12:13–21; 1 Tim 6:7).

The Bible warns us against putting our hope in **whatever saves our physical lives** (Ps 33:10–11, 16–17; Isa 30:15–16; 31:1–3; Hos 10:13). Personal strength, an army to bid, our resources and greatest plans—none of these will deliver us from death and take us into heaven.

The Bible warns us against putting our hope in **false gods** (Ps 115:4–8; Hab 2:18–19). They are made and make nothing themselves. They give no profit to those who worship them but bring woe from God instead.

Everyone “who is joined with all the living has hope” one way or the other (Ecc 9:4), but if your hope is in any of these things, you have “hope in this life only” and “are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). You will “grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). You will be “separated from Christ... having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Your hope will be eternally deferred, and your heart will be forever sick (Prov 13:12). “Hope that is seen”—people, riches, resources, or gods made by men—“is not hope” (Rom 8:24). “The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:18).

So let me help you see the unseen and give you eternal hope today.

5. The Bible tells us what true hope really is.

There is only “the one hope” (Eph 4:4) which comes from “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13), which is in “Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). More specifically, it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). What I mean by that is this.

a. Perfection

There was once a day when hope was unknown and unnecessary to man on earth. God created all things, man included, and walked and talked with him (cf. Gen 3:8). Everything was perfect. Faith was sight and hope unknown, and man knew only love (cf. 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8; 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5–6; Heb 6:10–12; 1 Pet 1:21–22).

⁷ Again, see E.F. Harrison, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v., “Hope” and Nelson, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s.v., “Hope.”

b. To Hopelessness

But then, man sinned, and the human race sinned in him (Rom 5:12). Spiritual and physical death became his wages (Gen 2:17; Rom 3:23). Creation itself was cursed (Gen 3:17). Instead of getting better, things were worse, and the end for this world is destruction and for people, fire forever (2 Peter 3:10–12; Rev 20:10, 14–15). This is hopelessness, the opposite of hope.

Like man in that moment, we, too, have sinned and deserve eternal death. We fail to love God and worship ourselves or other things instead. We take His name in vain. We fail to worship Him. We disobey our parents. We hate others and murder them in our hearts. We are immoral in thought and action. We stole, we lie, and we covet, lusting for what is not ours.

Did God give a true, eternal hope to man when the world first became so hopeless? In a population of billions, man's sins are now more than ever before, all of which bring pain, sorrow, and tears. How can all of this hopelessness be undone?

c. To Hope

As God gave hope then, so also our hope is now. What they did not see, we see in part, and the full is yet to come.

i. What They Did Not See

God promised that one of man's descendants would undo everything of sin (cf. Gen 3:15). He spoke of something future that all desire and, by virtue of His word, gave certainty of its coming.

ii. What We See in Part

In the course of time, God sent His Son Jesus, both God and man, to live sinlessly and die for sin. Sinless, He could die for the sins of others and thus provide forgiveness to those who repent of their sins and trust in Him. He could also give his righteousness to those who trust in Him. Thus, God declares those who believe as forgiven and righteous in Christ.

iii. What We Will See in Time to Come

All those who trust and hope in Christ know that God raised His Son from death and brought Him to His heavenly throne. Christ will come again, and His return is our "blessed hope" because He will completely undo sin and make all things new (Titus 2:13; cf. Rom 8:19–25).

For the Christian, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8–9; cf. 1:13).

For all of creation, it will be perfect again, ourselves included, and unlike when man first fell, we can never fall again. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). So, “We hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom 8:25). Our faith tells us these things are so. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

This hope is not “escapism, futility, indifference,” as some might say.⁸ It is true hope by faith in God that realizes with certainty that judgment is coming and finds salvation in Him in contrast to all the false hopes of man (cf. Rom 4:18).

Until the fulfillment of all our hope in Christ and what shall come, our hope will change us personally and influence those around us in turn. Our hope gives us joy and boldness and love for our fellow man (Rom 12:12; 2 Cor 3:12; Col 1:4–5). Our hope in Christ and what we will be purifies us even now (1 John 3:3). Our hope pulls us through adversity (1 Thess 1:3) and even help us to abound (Rom 15:13). Hoping in heaven, we are sojourners, exiles, and strangers in this world (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13) and thus stand out among hopeless men. As they ask us for the reason of hope within us, we must speak of hope to them (1 Pet 3:15). May they, and you, join us in our hope in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The Bible gives us two pictures of hope to help us carry on. First, knowing that life will bring adversity and God’s full wrath will surely come, we “put on... for a **helmet** the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:7; cf. Eph 6:17). Hoping in Christ now and in His soon return, we battle through the hopelessness of a hopeless world.

Second, whatever storms of life might come our way, we are as steady ships with “a sure and steadfast **anchor** of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf” (Heb 6:19–20).

So, hope in Jesus Christ and His salvation. Steady yourself by placing your anchor with Him in heaven. Protect yourself from the enemy and wrath to come by wearing the helmet of salvation. Have hope in a hopeless world by trusting only in Him.

⁸ Paul K. McAlister, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v., “Hope,” 1:997