

The Importance of Hope

Biblical reference to HOPE (All quotations from RSV unless otherwise noted):

Jeremiah 31:17. There is hope for your future, says the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country

Lamentations 3:26. It is good that a man should be hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. (KJV)

Psalms 39:7. And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in thee.

Psalms 42:5. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Psalms 71:5. For though, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Psalms 119:116. Uphold me according to thy promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope!

Psalms 146; 3. Put not your trust in princes
in a son of man, in whom there is no help
4. When his breath departs he returns to his earth;
on that very day his plans perish.
5. Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God,
6. who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
7. who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food for the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoner free;
8. the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous
9. The Lord watches over the sojourners,
he upholds the widow and the fatherless;
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

10. The Lord will reign for ever,
thy God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the Lord!

Proverbs 13:12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

I Peter 3:15. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

I John 3:3. Everyone who thus hopes in him (Christ) purifies himself as he (Christ) is pure.

1. Hope is important both for people and for God

1.1 Hope is the antidote for fear. “We have nothing to fear but fear itself” (Franklin Delano Roosevelt). Fear debilitates; but hope gives strength and energy. Hope is necessary for both psychological and spiritual health. (Give your own examples.)

1.2 True hope is founded on the belief that God is powerful and will act to accomplish his purposes. But since God cannot fulfill His will without human agents, God needs people who have hope in order that His work can proceed.

1.3 There are theologies based on hope, such as the Theology of Hope of the German theologian Jurgen Moltmann and the liberation theologies from Latin America and the third world. These theologies emphasize hope for economic and political change, and tie these hopes to Biblical claims that God aids those who are oppressed. (Liberation theologies, however, are also closely tied to Marxism, and thus contain objectionable elements.)

1.4 God must have been the original hopeful being. God must have created out of hope – hope that creation would result in goodness. Inspiration and enthusiasm, then, have their ultimate roots in the spirit that God had in the process of creation.

2. We must distinguish between true and false hope

2.1 Goodness and Godliness are fountains of hope, even in the most hopeless situations, while evil and ungodliness lead to loss of hope and to despair, even in situations that seemingly promise only fulfillment of whatever is desired. (Give your own examples. E.g., the Pilgrims and their adventures, versus the drug dealers who seem to make huge amounts of money and live well but who eventually come to grief, or whatever other examples you know.)

2.2 The German people had enormous hope in Hitler and national Socialism, but the result was war, bloodshed, turmoil, and devastation. Likewise many people have

had hope in Communist revolutions, but the result has been greater oppression than what existed before the revolution. So hope itself is not sufficient; hope must be invested in what is Godly, otherwise the result will betray the hope. The Psalmist cautions against putting trust in political figures (princes), because their power is at best temporary. (One can perhaps hope that they will fulfill whatever is at issue, but one should not invest them with ultimate trust.)

2.3 In the Bible, correct or worthwhile hope is always tied with what is Godly, while the strongest hope invested in what is ungodly cannot last and eventually results in despair. All saints have connected their hope with acting to fulfill the desires of God.

3. Hope is tied to action to fulfill whatever is hoped for; hope is not simply actionless faith or belief. “So faith by itself, if it has now works, is dead” (James 2:17). (The whole passage, James 2:14-26, is worth quoting on this subject.)

3.1 True faith is connected not just to believing, but to acting or working to carry out that faith. (James gives the examples of Abraham and Rahab; you can give whatever other examples you know from the Bible or from elsewhere.)

3.2 Jesus and other saints acted to fulfill God’s desire, and thereby demonstrated their faith and hope. Without that demonstration, no one would have remembered them. So our respect for them is not just because of their hope, but because of their activity connected with their hope.

3.3 God can act only when there are human agents who do the will of God. Good hope in the activity and providence of God therefore requires action in whatever way works to fulfill that hope. So good people and saints are always co-workers with God in carrying out any hoped-for thing. These people base their hope on their belief that God is powerful, that God will act to fulfill his part in achieving the goal, and that he will aid whoever is working together with him. “We are laborers together with God” (1 Corinthians 3:9, KJV). (Explain this point, and provide your own examples. This point should especially be tied with whatever interests your audience is most concerned with, and should be used to leave your audience feeling challenged to work to fulfill whatever point(s) you are trying to impress on them.)