

571 An Anchor for the Soul

To mark the New Year of 2024, a Christian act of worship was recently broadcast on the radio on the theme of Hope: so far, so good and so normal. As the service proceeded, with its hymns, anthems, readings, sermon and prayers, it became clear that there was “something amiss” with the Hope that was being set forth!

Here was an avowedly Christian occasion in the presence of a Bishop, which was presumably being heard by thousands of people for whom the trustworthy Bible-based message of Rock-solid Hope in Christ would be a literal “Godsend” in these dangerous times. Instead came the old message of our struggle for “peace and justice” in this needy world: herein, as the narrative implied, “lies our reason for Hope, as all people of goodwill strive to right the wrongs of the world around us; we can do it, we will do it – that is why we have Hope!”.

Now of course we have God-given responsibilities to care for the lives of those around us, bringing goodness and light and hope and joy in place of all the opposites as and where we can; it is called “loving our neighbours as ourselves”! (egs., Leviticus 19.18b / Luke 10.27). But to suggest that such efforts are “the be-all and end-all” when it comes to Christian Hope is clearly a nonsense; what is worse, it is the serving-up of mere cardboard in the pretence that it is fresh bread.

For Christian Hope, (along with all the other deep blessings bestowed upon us by God’s grace in the Christian Faith), is of course a Consequence, an Effect, a Result; it exists only because of all that has been put in place beforehand to enable it to exist. Thus we have God’s perfect creation, quickly fouled up by human sin and its consequences (Genesis 1-11 / Romans 5.12, 17a); then God’s unique Remedy in the gift of His sinless Son as Messiah, Saviour and Lord (Luke 2.9-14); then the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which has opened the way back, from exile from God into fellowship with God, from darkness to light, from death to life, from hopelessness to Hope, by simple acceptance by faith of the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 52.13-53.12 / Matthew 1.18-23 / John 5.24;6.35-40 / Romans 5.1-5; 8.28-39 / I Corinthians 15.22-26, 57). Christ-believers are granted new birth, forgiveness of their sins, freedom from eternal judgment, fellowship with the Lord God and with one another, along with purpose, understanding and assurance. It is on these mighty divine achievements that there then sits Christian Hope!

So let some further texts, based on biblical Hope and chosen from the many, now flow for our encouragement. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy [cometh] in the morning ... But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more” (Psalms 30.5; 71.14) / “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is” (Jeremiah 17.7) / “[It is] good that [a man] should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD” (Lamentations 3.26) / “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5.5) / “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ...” (Titus 2.13) / “That ... we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which [hope] we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast ...” (from Hebrews 6.18-19); and from last week’s Reflection, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (I John 5.4-5).

We do well to avoid three mistakes concerning this Christian Hope. The first mistake is to say in effect, “Yes, yes, how very nice!” – but then to ignore it in practice day by day by allowing a sense of hopelessness to take us over. The second mistake is to accept this Hope, but then to detach it from its Christ-Source, which was the error in that recent broadcast service: scripturally we are clearly told that the Hope we have is solely in and through Christ, and if or when Christ is set aside, so too is set aside all possible Hope (eg., John 14.6). This brings us to our third possible error regarding Christian Hope – that we “hog it” to ourselves! But - “... [be] ready always to [give] an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (from I Peter 3.15).

Thanks be to God, our Christian Hope is indeed an “anchor for the soul” - solidly grounded, Christ-rooted, and ever-ready to be shared

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