

Is there any hope?

In December 1927, off the coast of Provincetown, Mass., the Coast Guard destroyer Paulding rammed the submarine S-4. The destroyer captain saved his ship by driving it on the beach, but the submarine quickly sank. The collision damaged the submarine and trapped its entire crew of 40. The crew faced death within 40 hours. Ships rushed to the scene of the disaster and attempted to raise the submarine. Regrettably, a northeaster struck the area and the attempt to raise the submarine had to be abandoned. Four days later they sent divers down to check for survivors. Beyond hope, six crewmen had survived the collision. The diver placed his helmet against the side of the vessel so that by direct contact he might hear sounds from within the submarine. He heard a tapping noise. Someone was tapping out a question in the dots and dashes of the Morse code. The question came slowly: “Is ... there ... any ... hope?”

Regrettably, there was none. The rescuers could not raise the submarine in time.¹ The entire crew perished.

When we consider the condition of mankind today as we face the prospects of war, starvation, disease and ultimately death this question looms starkly before us: “Is there any hope?”

The anxieties of the world have never been more evident than they are now in the worries about war; climate change; the frightening epidemics of Ebola and other diseases; massive earthquakes, and the fear of economic collapse resulting in the destruction of entire industries and a lifetime of work.

Is there any hope? Some would say, “No.”

It is no surprise that people would lose hope. The ones who lose hope are those whose horizon reaches only as far as the joy of physical pleasure, or the mindless accumulation of material wealth, or the temporary acquisition of political power—all of which they must surely lose when they face the yawning pit that awaits at the end of their fleeting lives.

Perhaps the question should be rephrased: “Does the world offer any hope?”

The answer is: No.

¹ <http://www.capecodtoday.com/article/2014/12/17/2185-december-17-1927-coast-guard-cutter-sinks-sub-provincetown>.

The world offers nothing but temporary pleasure, and that to be followed by suffering and then death. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

In their former lives the Ephesian Christians could have looked forward only to a brief delay from suffering, or to temporary interludes of pleasure, but in the end they had no hope. Such is the best the world has to offer.

Even David expressed the despair that is common to humanity in his prayer at the dedication of the offerings that were to be used in the building of the temple,

1 Chronicles 29:13 “Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. 14 “But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. 15 “For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.

The Pulpit Commentary says of the word that is here translated “hope” that the word “abiding” expresses sufficiently the intended meaning.² By this we understand that David saw life on earth as temporary, short and in terms of what earthly life offers there is no hope.

Job echoed the words of David when he spoke of the futility of his own life. In Job Chapter 7 and verse 1 we read,

Job 7:1 “Is not man forced to labor on earth,
And are not his days like the days of a hired man?
2 “As a slave who pants for the shade,
And as a hired man who eagerly waits for his wages,
3 So am I allotted months of vanity,
And nights of trouble are appointed me.

² H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, *Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 6, I and II Chronicles*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan. p. 437.

4 “When I lie down I say,
‘When shall I arise?’
But the night continues,
And I am continually tossing until dawn.
5 “My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt,
My skin hardens and runs.
6 “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,
And come to an end without hope. NASB.

What David and Job alluded to we all have to feel. But the feeling for Christians is different than that felt by those that have no hope.

Job also said,

Job 14:1 “Man, who is born of woman,
Is short-lived and full of turmoil.
2 “Like a flower he comes forth and withers.
He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.
3 “You also open Your eyes on him
And bring him into judgment with Yourself.
4 “Who can make the clean out of the unclean?
No one!
5 “Since his days are determined,
The number of his months is with You;
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.
6 “Turn Your gaze from him that he may rest,
Until he fulfills his day like a hired man.
7 “For there is hope for a tree,
When it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
And its shoots will not fail.
8 “Though its roots grow old in the ground
And its stump dies in the dry soil,
9 At the scent of water it will flourish
And put forth sprigs like a plant.
10 “But man dies and lies prostrate.
Man expires, and where is he?

11 “As water evaporates from the sea,
And a river becomes parched and dried up,
12 So man lies down and does not rise.
Until the heavens are no longer,
He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep.

Job eloquently described man’s condition. It is a life devoid of hope.

Now, it is true that formerly we had no hope. But today things are different. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brought hope to the ones who believe in Him. Hope is not a thing that perishes when the man dies. The hope remains.

That hope is to be brought to the Christian when Christ returns. As Paul wrote,

1 Thess. 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

The hope that the Christian has is in Christ and it has as its basis the resurrection of Christ from the dead. From the vantage point of the flesh we see the dead as sleeping, and indeed the Lord used just such an expression when he described the condition of Lazarus of Bethany. ³ “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.”

Therefore, the Christian looks forward not to annihilation, but to be awakened out of “sleep.” It is a blessed hope, and one that offers encouragement to the faint of heart in the face of suffering. For as Paul wrote to Titus we are,

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus...

The Apostle Peter said we are to fix our hope completely on that gift that Christ brings with Him when He returns,

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

³ John 11:11; 14.

That is a hope that offers comfort to the Christian in the face of the disappointments, the calamity and ruin that stalks this world.

Luke tells us in the book of Acts that,

When Dorcas died her friends and fellow Christians fell to weeping. Luke wrote that Dorcas was a woman who was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.⁴ In their grief the disciples sent for Peter and the scripture says when the messengers reached him,

Acts 9:39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

Here was a woman whose deeds testified of her worth and value to the community of Christians. Such love and devotion to service deserves to live. Moreover, the hope this church had was in God. They knew of the work that God was doing through the Apostle Peter. He was nearby so they sent for him. When Peter came he appealed to the only one who has the ability under these circumstances to awaken Dorcas out of sleep,

Acts 9:40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

The people in the house of Jairus were convinced that Jairus’ daughter had died. Jesus told them that she was asleep. When Jesus spoke to her He said, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”⁵

She got up.

Another time Jesus said he would go and awaken Lazarus from sleep. Now Lazarus had been dead four days. But when Jesus called him, “Lazarus, come forth.”

John 11:44 The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth.

Jesus restores hope where there is none.

⁴ Acts 9:36.

⁵ Mark 5:41.

Winston Churchill's died on Sunday January 24, 1965. They held his funeral in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. His funeral was the largest state funeral in history up to that time. Evidently, Churchill arranged his own funeral. He included the rich and eloquent verses of the Anglican funeral ceremony. Then he had a bugler who stood in the upper levels of the auditorium sound taps—which is the piece that is performed at dusk and in funerals. That is usually the end of the ceremony, but not for Churchill. He then arranged for another bugler, farther away, to sound reveille.

Reveille for the soldier means, Wake up! Arise!

It meant the same for Churchill.⁶

As it was for Churchill so it is for every Christian. The Christian possesses the hope that after taps he will hear a reveille. Arise!

Churchill hoped in the life to follow this one. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

But the writer of the Hebrew letter pointed out the strength of that hope that we have in Christ,

Hebrews 6:13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." 15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

I had a cousin who was a bomber pilot in the Second World War. He flew the B-24. It was a large, ungainly, four engine aircraft with a portly fuselage and twin vertical tails. Pilots say it handled like a truck. Their squadron was based in North Africa.

⁶ Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations

Once when he was returning from a bombing mission over Europe a German Messerschmitt fighter plane attacked his bomber formation and set his plane on fire. The bullets from the enemy aircraft also damaged the fuel tanks and high octane gasoline began to pour into the aircraft and accumulate between the bulkheads. They were flying over the Mediterranean Sea. My cousin helped the rest of the crew bail out of the aircraft. He said they parachuted from the aircraft by opening the bomb bay doors and jumping out. He was the last to jump.

As he jumped something affected the actuators for the bomb bay doors and they closed on his legs. The doors held him tightly, and he could neither return to the aircraft cabin, nor could he go out. So he hung there with his legs dangling out, and the rest of him inside the doomed bomber. Not only did the pressure from the doors squeeze his legs, but the flames from the burning engines threatened to reach the leaking fuel and end his short life there in the sky above the sea.

He lost all hope. He said he figured he was facing the end, and since it was his last opportunity he might as well have a cigarette. So he lit two.

Before he could finish the first the aircraft exploded. And the next thing he knew he was floating in the sea and a German rescue craft was approaching him on the water. He spent the remainder of the war in a German prisoner of war camp, but while there he met a German physician who cared for his injured legs and his burns. He survived the war and for many years thereafter, but he carried the scars of his ordeal.

My cousin lost hope that day, and who could blame him. But there is no reason for the Christian to lose hope. For as the Hebrew writer said, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us...”

So we do not lose hope.

Today, vast numbers of the people of the world are like the ancient Ephesians who ignored the gospel and groveled in their misery; they are strangers to the promise that is in Christ and are without God, and without hope. But the Christian possesses hope and is as the Apostle Paul described in Philippians,

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Don't lose hope.