

# Hope

by Jared D. Edson

We live in interesting times, and since I've had fifty years in those times I feel somewhat qualified to speak about how interesting those times are. It seems that in every generation we have the boogeymen of culture -- the things that will surely bring the end of civilization as we know it. Perhaps it is stated as the end of humanity or of life on earth, but the result is always a widespread panic that we must be prepared to face imminently.

In my lifetime it was the Cold War, then it was the War on Terror, the epidemics and pandemics of the world, and so on and so forth. History tells us as we look at those in the rearview mirror or alongside us that we must not forget the very real and lasting consequences of those circumstances, because there were and are some very significant upheavals in worldwide politics and society. "The end," whatever it might be, has never been any closer than good people have allowed it to become, and so it is today.

I could talk about the failure of people to think rationally or how they have become fearful because they are instructed to be fearful, but that is not what I would like to talk about. We can talk about the bad things going on until the atmosphere is depleted of oxygen, but that doesn't really help anyone.

People need hope, and hope means having something to look forward to. Something that is good. Politics gives no form of hope to anyone, nor has it ever done so. Society does not give hope either, nor do popular culture icons or the latest philosophies of science.

What does that leave?

Hope, if it is to be understood and useful, is an expectation for something good that is not harmful to people. But there is a very big picture that we need to view if we are to understand what is or is not harmful to people.

Let's begin with good intentions. Yes, there is a saying that indicates how good intentions make good pavement for a road to hell, but how is that useful? If you do not have good intentions, then what purpose are you fulfilling in your life other than to drag down others with you? You have to start somewhere, and good intentions are a good place. Do not be deceived by popular cynicism.

We celebrate holidays at various times of the year because we want to memorialize good things. We congratulate people on their birthdays not to poke fun at how old they are (though we also do that in jest), but because their lives have made an indelible mark on those around them, one worth remembering and celebrating. All commercialization aside, holidays were set in place because of a desire to remember the good and promote the good, even if sometimes those holidays memorialize the sacrifices of others.

We have a scourge that is afflicting humanity that is more damaging than any disease, and yet it is curable. That cure is not hard to find, but human nature and the dregs of social culture obscure it so that it can seem to be hard to find. The cure is to believe that something good can and will happen.

Though some writers have profited by the application of the catch-phrase, "the power of positive thinking," which suggests that all good things will simply fall into your lap if you only think positively, I will not make that suggestion. But when you embark on any journey you begin with some expectation that you could possibly even get to where you want to go.

It is true that there is what we call "vain hope," when our expectations are well above the possibility of achievement, yet the lack of hope almost guarantees failure and disappointment.

People cannot be truly happy if they do not have hope. People can sometimes be in the most miserable circumstances, but count themselves happy because they have hope. This is the nature of what life exists for.

I wouldn't care to suggest the song, "Don't worry, be happy" for a modus operandi, because there are things we can't control that make life more difficult, even depressing and painful. But that does not have to be a permanent condition. What we think life's purpose is for will ultimately develop our sense and desire for hope.

And that is where Jesus Christ fits in. Yes, this had to become a conversation about Him. It must. Our desire for good leads to the Author of all things good, and comes from the same Author. The unabashed benevolence He has demonstrated for us by taking our place on the cross of sin is the very epitome of why we can have hope for anything good in either this life or the next.

The only hope for us if eternal life weren't an option, is to leave a legacy that someone else can enjoy for their short time on earth. But to recognize that a vast unknown eternity of possibility exists beyond our mortal existence is worth devoting a life to making the hope a reality.

A perfectly restored body that is not subject to pain, hunger, fatigue, disease or any other ills is certainly the most driving factor most could imagine, but it is more than that. Consider having all of those advantages and being privileged to enjoy that experience while surrounded by others so blessed to do the same, and to do so in the presence of Jesus Christ Himself.

For those that don't appreciate the significance of that last part, remember that it was He who created your soul in the beginning. He knew you, your parents, their parents, and so forth back to Adam and Eve because He made each one. Don't you think that conversations with that same being would be beyond the limited intellects and imaginations we possess today? Or to be witness of whatever new things He does?

Eternal life in the presence of Jesus Christ is the only hope that can drive us towards that selfsame goal, but getting there means fulfilling our part. Think of it like paying the toll at the turnpike if you will - there is a cost. It is not a monetary cost, and it doesn't make us "deserving" of eternal life, but not doing what is required will make our hope truly vain. Jesus paid the ultimate "cost" for us, but grace is only sufficient for those who act in good faith, having a desire for good that is based on the premise that hoping and doing go hand-in-hand.

As you watch or read the news, keep in mind that few if any of the events unfolding in those words are designed to instill a hope of anything good. Read them carefully and in context so that you won't fall into the scourge that is sweeping the world, and by "scourge" I do not refer to the diseases of the flesh.

Maybe then you can see the wisdom in the scripture which says, "perfect love casteth out fear." (see 1 John 4:18).

As I tell people on an increasing basis, take care of the important things first. Learn what good actually is; have a desire for it; do it; abide in it. Learn to love that which is good - not in a lustful and self-aggrandizing manner - but in the wholesome well-meaning sense you find when reading the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. You may just find that if you try to love the good, you may actually like it also.

As a word of warning, be aware that when you seek to do good you will find opposition, and it will not be nice to you. Become assured of the good and it will become part of you so that you will no longer have any disposition to find or study evil. There is already enough evil in the world that you don't have to search for it to find it.

Don't delight in darkness, but survey the light and enjoy the brilliance it affords your mind and heart. You will become quickened by it, and that light is the light of Christ. You will feel hope emerging in your soul, and it will taste like the love of God. The darkness of this world will become utterly dark to you and bitter with the scornfulness of sin.

Consider well what Jesus foretold concerning the times to come, and remember that all He has ever done is to make possible your happiness in His presence.

Luke 21:24-28 (Inspired Version of the Bible)

24 Now these things he spake unto them concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. And then his disciples asked him, saying, Master, tell us concerning thy coming.

25 And he answered them and said, In the generation in which the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled, there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, like the sea and the waves roaring. The earth also shall be troubled and the waters of the great deep,

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

27 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh.

28 And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Can you imagine that we are given commandments to rejoice even in the worst of circumstances? Yet those who do so will not be compelled to rejoice, but will do so out of the hope and willingness of the heart to give honor and glory to God. Put those thoughts in your heart today and it will become your natural response on the day when we will see the Lord, "coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

You may find that you like the experience of having hope and joy. You may even want to share it with others.