

Dear members and friends of St. John,

What is **hope** to the non-Christian? How does the secular world define **hope**? Here are some popular quotes on what hope is, from those who don't believe.

*Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality.* Dr. Jonas Salk.

*Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.* Epicurus

*I do believe that most men live lives of quiet desperation. For despair, optimism is the only practical solution. Hope is practical. Because eliminate that and it's pretty scary. Hope at least gives you the option of living.* Harry Nilsson

**Hope for the unbeliever is rooted in themselves.** A person must somehow muster up the hope that is needed to move forward. Without the motivation that comes from hope in his future, man is paralyzed. Life becomes meaningless. Like Nilsson says, "Men live lives of quiet desperation."

So, what's the problem? It shouldn't be too difficult to whip up a little hope on our own, right? The difficulty lies in the reality of our past. We aren't good at predicting the future, nor are we good at charting a course for our life. Too often, the things we have hoped for, when they became a reality, were disappointing or even hurtful to us and others (sorry, Epicurus, but what we have is often the mess of our own making). Hindsight is 20-20. Our view of the future is not. Our decision making is tainted by sin. Basing hope on yourself is like betting everything on a horse with a broken leg. The odds aren't good.

**So, what makes Christian hope so different from secular hope?** Real hope in our future is **not** something that we must produce within ourselves – it's **given to us from God**. And our Lord's view of the future is perfectly clear. Hear what the author of Hebrews says about hope:

*"So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup>so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup>We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup>where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (6:17-20, ESV).*

The first part of this text speaks to **God's promise to Abraham**, followed by God Himself extending an **oath** to give us a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (see Ps. 110:4). **Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises to us. This makes Jesus Christ the sure anchor of our souls.** We have God's own word and oath – and that's more secure than anything man can hope for on his own. Jesus' death on the cross has torn the curtain that separated man from God. Man has been reconciled to God. With faith in Jesus, given to us by the Holy Spirit, we have forgiveness for all of our sins. We have the promise of eternal life. And

when we do sin, we have Jesus as our intercessor, our High Priest, who intercedes for us with our Father in heaven.

All of this points to **a hope not centered on our goodness or abilities**, but on **God's goodness and mercy**, giving us His guarantee of eternal life in heaven. And this is a guarantee that can't be broken.

**The difference between manmade hope and God's eternal hope could not be more striking.** We have **sure and certain hope** that will not disappoint us. We have God's own promise and oath. Consider these words from our Christian forefather, John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.:

*[The author of Hebrews] shows that while we are still in the world and not yet departed from this life, we are already living amid God's promises. For through hope we are already in heaven... As the anchor, dropped from the vessel does not allow it to be carried about even if ten thousand winds agitate it but, being depended upon, makes it steady, so also does hope.<sup>1</sup>*

**Manmade hope is shaken by the first little storm that comes**, leaving one in a state of despair (sorry, Mr. Nilsson, optimism is too easily washed overboard when man is in trouble, stripping man of his "only practical solution.") Our Christian hope is anchored in Christ Jesus' atoning work, and no storm, no matter how great can break this bond with God. Chrysostom is correct: through hope we are already in heaven. May this sure and certain hope of heaven be your anchor, until you live with Him in heaven forever. Amen.

Pastor Travis

1. Oden, Thomas C., Ed, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol. X, Hebrews*, InterVarsity Press, c. 2005, p. 93.