

Call to Worship

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. (1 Pet. 1:3-4 NIV)

Invocation:

Father we come because it is your invitation that brings us into your presence. You lovingly urge us to come confidently and indeed boldly into your fatherly presence to see more and learn more of this kingdom which is our inheritance. To enjoy solid assured hope into the future filled with joy is your promised desire for our lives. Thank you, we are very grateful and we wish to sing of your goodness and sit again at your feet together to hear your Word to us.

Amen.

Hymn: 'My hope is built on nothing less'

1. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.
2. When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.
3. His oath, His covenant, His blood support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.
4. When He shall come with trumpet sound, oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

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Reading of Holy Scripture:

- Psalm 33, a testimony to hope in God.
- Matthew 12:9-21, the one reference to hope in the Gospels
- Hebrews 10:16-23

Message: The substance of Hope

You and I have an enormous capacity for experiencing hope - the expectation of good. We are created to experience unending hope. This can only be fully experienced in relationship with our Creator and the Bible declares in many places he lovingly wants us to have it to the full.

But what is Hope and what is the difference between Biblical hope and secular or worldly hope?

Attempts to have hope apart from trust in Jesus' relationship are subjective projections. For example, so-called New Age hope: Based on evolutionary life force and the evolution of consciousness. i.e. The idea that mankind is progressively evolving to a higher spiritual eternal state being purified through an incarnational process in an endless series of lives. But this offers no hope, only fear and destroys loving community as each one strives to protect themselves. *Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.* (Ephesians 2:12)

Contrast this with what the Bible calls a 'better hope'. (1) It is founded upon the Person of the Living God and His actual acts in history, in time and space, on earth and documented by witnesses. (2) It is a judgment on all human hope to be futureless and limited to this one earthly life. *When a wicked man dies, his hope perishes; all he expected from his power comes to nothing.* (Prov 11:7) *For what hope has the godless when he is cut off, when God takes away his life* (Job 27:8) *Brothers we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.* (1Thess 4:13)

Biblical, or real Hope has come into this world and into our lives if we receive it! So what is it?

The Living God loves to give us solid Hope: All the covenants are promises both now and into the future: The great Covenants: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the new Covenant all breathe Hope and bless us with peace as we enter into them by trust.

Hope is unseen. Not only because it is in the future. What is visibly present offers no basis of hope, since it belongs to this sphere of the seen, the flesh. *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.* (Romans 8:24,25)

Hope has substance. This Hope has entered the world and can be experienced through trusting the Word of Scripture about Jesus, experienced, in the revelation of His truth. *I declare to you brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* (1Cor 15:50)

Hope is for everyone: *Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* (Eph. 2:12-13) Without God means to be without the knowledge of God, without the revelation. For the main part the Nations had to live in the world, lives limited by the things of the world, and had to face the trials and sorrows and perplexities of the world without the knowledge of God to interpret the whole.

The Gentile world had no prospect for the future, no assurance of life beyond this. The Greeks for example, looked back on a golden age in the past, rather than to a future glory. They took a cyclic view of history like a New Age approach. There was therefore no concept of a goal to which all things were moving, and this lack of hope was seen most notably in their dismal view of death.

Paul made it very clear that hope which is limited to the secular is a very weak and ineffective experience of hope, in fact is pitiful. *If Christ has not been raised ... then those also who have*

fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:18-19)

We should nourish our hope by thinking about it and becoming increasingly steadfast about the hope we have in Christ Jesus. *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. (Eph. 1:18)* Jesus is our model and pioneer on Hope. He went in obedience to Jerusalem to call it to repentance and to preach the Jubilee of God. He knew it would mean death, but his hope was fixed on the fruit of His suffering. *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (Lk. 9:51)* Jesus doesn't mention His sufferings here, His mind and eye are firmly fixed on the Hope and goal of His suffering which is resurrection and ascension to rule the world for His Father's glory and our redemption.

So we can and should look ahead to the reward which is ours for living day by day in obedience to our Lord and the laws He has written on our hearts. Perhaps like a long motor drive and the windscreen dirties with mud and insects but you keep your eyes not on the dirt spots, though they are an annoyance, but on the road ahead.

Prayers: Confession and Dedication

Our heavenly Father we thank you for opening for us a living hope. Hope that is the very person of our resurrected Lord. Help us to live day by day such that our lives make no sense unless it is true that Jesus is risen and we are united in Him and what was His is just as truly ours. Where we have drifted away from this living Hope and become as anyone who has not heard of the risen Jesus, please forgive us, and open our eyes afresh.

On this day having heard again of the solid Hope we have right now in Jesus, we want to say that we will live in confident hope of seeing Jesus in heaven; of receiving His fair and generous reward, the joy of faithful living in this world of opposition to the Kingdom. The Hope of sins forgiven and hearing our names read from the Lamb's Book of Life. The Hope of inheriting and going on to live in the eternal kingdom and taking up all the Saviour has in store for us. In Jesus' Name.

The Lord's prayer:

Hymn: *by James Montgomery*

1. Forever with the Lord! Amen, so let it be!
Life from His death is in that word 'tis immortality.
Here in the body pent¹, absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march nearer home
2. My Father's house on high, home of my soul, how near
At times to faith's foreseeing eye Thy golden gates appear!

¹ Pent: closely confined, restricted.

Ah! then my spirit faints to reach the land I love,
The bright inheritance of saints, Jerusalem above.

3. Yet clouds will intervene, and all my prospect flies;
Like Noah's dove, I flit between rough seas and stormy skies.
Anon the clouds depart, the winds and waters cease,
While sweetly o'er my gladdened heart expands the bow of peace.
4. I hear at morn and even, at noon and midnight hour,
The choral harmonies of Heaven earth's Babel tongues o'erpower;
Then, then I feel that He, remembered or forgot,
The Lord, is never far from me, though I perceive Him not.
5. Forever with the Lord! forever in His will,
The promise of that faithful word, Lord, here in me fulfill.
With You at my right hand, then I shall never fail;
Uphold me, Lord, and I shall stand, through grace I will prevail.
6. So when my latest breath breaks through the veil of pain,
By death I shall escape from death, and life eternal gain.
That resurrection word, that shout of victory:
Once more, forever with the Lord, Amen, so let it be!

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Prayer, intercession

Father we lift up before you the pastors, teachers, apostles and evangelists that you have raised up to spearhead the formation of your kingdom on earth. Embolden them to proclaim your holy Gospel. We lift those known to us who falter in their faith and we ask that you alert them and stir them to return to you with renewed hearts.

Pray by name for those you are particularly concerned for in your church, community or family. Pray for the persecuted church. You could use the prayer for this Sunday in the Barnabas magazine.

Benediction

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (Rom. 15:13 and 2 Cor. 13:14)

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