

Hopes and Dreams

Summary:

During Advent we have lit the candle of hope on the Christmas wreath. Now we look at what our hopes are for 2025, and how that relates to the sure hope we have in Jesus.

Call to Worship

Psalm 18 I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Prayer

Lord, I thank you that you are my rock, deliverer, refuge, stronghold, shield, and Saviour.

Forgive me the times when I have sought other rocks to build on and have taken refuge in things that promise comfort and satisfaction but never deliver.

Lord, thank you that your Holy Spirit pursues me when I stray, restores my hope in you, assures me of forgiveness and leads me in the way of righteousness. I can hardly grasp the love you have for me.

Praise your name my loving Father.

Praise your name my Saviour, Jesus. Amen

Song: MHB 436 by Mary Shekleton

1. It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine, my Saviour Jesus, yet this soul of mine
Would of Thy love, in all its breadth and length, Its height and depth, and everlasting
Know more and more. strength,
2. It passeth telling, that dear love of Thine, my Saviour Jesus, yet these lips of mine
Would fain proclaim to sinners far and near a love which can remove all guilty fear,
And love beget.
3. It passeth praises, that dear love of Thine, my Saviour Jesus! Yet this heart of mine
Would sing that love, so full, so rich, so free, which brings a rebel sinner, such as me,
Nigh unto God.
4. O fill me, Saviour Jesus, with Thy love! Lead, lead me to the living fount above;
Thither may I, in simple faith, draw nigh, and never to another fountain fly,
But unto Thee.
5. And then, when Jesus face to face I see, when at His lofty throne I bow the knee,
Then of His love, in all its breadth and length, its height and depth, its everlasting
My soul shall sing. strength,

© public domain

Hopes and Dreams

Prayer of Intercession

Lord, I pray for those who hope for peace this year,

- Those wracked by war, hunger, danger and death in the Middle East, Ukraine, the South China Sea, and many African nations.
- Those I know suffering mental illness, physical illness.
- Those whose relationships are a source of fear and anxiety.

I pray for those who hope for freedom this year,

- Those who are incarcerated for their faith.
- Those who live under oppressive regimes.
- Those who live with unrelenting physical pain.

I pray for those who hope for lifted burdens,

- Those who are homeless.
- Those under crippling debt.
- Those who struggle with parenting and those who aren't coping with leadership.

And where those things affect me, help me to put my trust in you who brings peace, brings freedoms, lifts burdens, so that others may see in me the hope that comes from Jesus.

In his name I pray. Amen

Song: "Cornerstone" (by Myrin, Morgan, Lijiro)

1. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
And I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus' name.
*Christ alone, cornerstone, weak made strong in the Saviour's love.
Through the storm, He is Lord, Lord of all.*
2. When darkness seems to hide His 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.
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 stand before the throne.

© Hillsong Music Publishing Australia, Used by permission CCLI 509237

Bible Reading:

- 1 Peter 1:3-9

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. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be

Hopes and Dreams

revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Message: “Hopes and Dreams”

We are in the early days of 2025 and maybe we have expressed our hopes for this new year. What do they look like? I hope the season will be better than last year – good rains, no frosts, good prices. I hope my health holds up. I hope my family relationships stay strong, or maybe improve. I hope my kids or grandkids studies lead to good results and secure jobs.

During this last Advent season at our church, we had a spot each week for one of our number, young students, older people, internationals, to share their hopes for the coming year. They were all worthy, exciting, positive, and springing from their faith in a steadfast God. It has given us the chance to pray for them as their lives unfold this year. But one thing we all know – not all of these hopes will be realised, because life throws us curveballs, unforeseen accidents, situations change our circumstances, and suffering is a fact of life. Satan loves it when our plans are derailed, and he loves to white-ant our hopes.

Sometimes this can lead us to think of hope in the sense that the world uses it. I hope I win the lottery. I hope this baby is going to be a girl. I hope my cancer disappears. I hope the spinning coin lands on heads. Hope becomes a wished-for outcome in a game of chance where God is not considered part of the equation. But standing firm under and over all of this are the Scripture promises of a sure hope.

Let’s have a look at some of them. Hebrews 11:1 (apparently the Bible’s only written definition of faith) says, “**Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see**”. Confidence and assurance may not be the first thing we think of when we consider hope. But we can be sure, we can be certain. The song Cornerstone (above) puts it this way. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Our sure hope has its foundation in what has happened in the past – Jesus’ blood has covered our sins. That means God’s righteousness is satisfied and he no longer sees sins, they are gone forever, and they no longer have to be accounted for.

When I was 14 years old and at a Sunday School picnic (remember those?!) my exuberance when playing a ball game saw me crash into a group of elderly people and, although unaware of it at the time I injured an old man. A few weeks later my Sunday School teacher told me of it and suggested I contact him and apologise. I compounded the situation by denying I had done it. The memory of this lie returned time and time again over the years (and the opportunity to redress it had long gone), and

Hopes and Dreams

I confessed this sin time and time again and condemned myself for it. But in later years I have realised that this sin has been accounted for by Jesus' blood, it is forgiven, it is covered, and it is me that keeps bringing it up, not God, who doesn't see it anymore. This is celebrated every time I drink the cup at the Lord's Table.

And the sin born in me, the source of committed sins, is also dealt with in Jesus' death on the cross, because when he died so did my old self, and I am now a new being. 2 Cor 5:17 **Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.** The old has gone, the new is here! So, the reason that I can have a sure, solid, unshakeable hope in whatever is going to happen in the future is because of what Jesus has already done. What has happened in the past in Jesus' death resurrection gives me absolute confidence for the future. We have the assurance of what we cannot see.

And the first thing we know with certainty is that we have eternal life. By our death on the cross with Jesus we are made fit for heaven, fit to be in the presence of God. Our hope is secure. We can't yet see it, but we have a sure hope. Secondly, we know that our faith can move mountains (Matt 17:20). Jesus often spoke in hyperbole, and I don't think he intended us to rearrange the geography of the planet, rather, the mountains he was referring to are those we face in our everyday lives. With only a little bit of faith (I'm still not sure how big the mustard seed referred to is!) these mountains can be moved. We have secure hope that anything we face is not too big for God to handle. How much this hope must encourage persecuted Christians. And how much can we say with Paul (Romans 8:38-39), **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** That's the sure hope we live in every day.

A young friend of ours whom I may have mentioned before, had severe epilepsy and endured several brain surgeries, and testing that meant drilling holes in her head and inserting probes (while she was awake) to measure the effectiveness of the surgeries. Her parents were of course extremely worried, but the response of this 14-year-old to her Mum at her bedside was, "Don't worry Mum, God's got this". Faith! Which is a sure hope in what she couldn't see.

And this sure hope we live in is not soulless, nor sad and depressing, nor a daily grind. We are all familiar with 1 Corinthians 13 which reminds us how good it is to live a life full of love and finishes with these words – **And now these three remain: Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** Paul also reminds us of the fruits of the Spirit which are ours in the new life we now live – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on. Or, as The Message version of Colossians says, **"We pray that you will have the strength to stick it out for the long-haul – not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the glory-strength God gives. It is this strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful he has for us."** This life of hope is not just a life of grit, determination and hanging on grimly knowing it will all be OK in the end. It is abundant life now.

Hopes and Dreams

All this is attested to in our baptism. We symbolically demonstrate that we have died and have been buried as we go under the water. That's the old life, the old self dead and buried - we died on the cross when Jesus died and were buried when Jesus was. Then we rise out of the water to a new life, one which by nature is not inclined to sin (1 John 3:9 – **No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot sin go on sinning, because they have been born of God.**), even though our old self often revisits and we succumb to the wiles of Satan who absolutely hates it that we are redeemed into a relationship with the Father and are dead to the world, Satan's world. As John Stott said, "Sin and the child of God are incompatible. They may occasionally meet but they cannot live together in harmony.

And we don't stand alone in this sure hope. By God's design and desire, we are part of the body of Christ, the church, whose purpose is to encourage and uphold one another. Hebrews 10:23-24. **And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

So, we enter the new year with hopes, dreams, desires and ambitions. But, whatever actually happens in 2025 we have a rock-solid hope in Jesus Christ and the blessed assurance of divine glory through what he has done in us. Praise God!

Song: MHB 422 "Blessed Assurance" by Frances Jane Alstynne

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation; purchase of God; born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
*This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.*
2. Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
3. Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Saviour am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

© public domain

Benediction

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the regions of the South-East, the Mallee, the Riverland, the mid-North, YP and EP, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood, grace and peace be yours in abundance.

(Based on 1 Peter 1:1-2)

Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA