

What Is My Hope?

By Horatius Bonar

"I HOPED by this time to have been at the top," said an old man, who had set out one pleasant autumn morning to climb the hill behind his dwelling. But he had mistaken the way, and was further from the top than when he set out. He returned weary and disappointed. Like those of whom Job speaks, "They were confounded, because they had hoped" (Job 6:20).

"I hoped by this time to have been happy," said a young man, as he sat at the helm of his splendid yacht, and steered her along in the sunshine. But with all his gold, and the pleasure which gold buys, he was duller and sadder than he was ten years before, when he set out to "enjoy life." He had mistaken the way, and his soul was emptier than ever. He sighed and looked round upon the blue waves in vain; they could not help him. "He was confounded *because he had hoped*." He had mistaken the way. Year after year had passed, and he had been going farther and farther from happiness. God was not in all his thoughts.

"I hoped by this time to have had peace with God," said a man of sixty, one Sabbath morning as he walked to the house of God. But he seemed as one who was farther off than ever from peace; and the thought of advancing years, without any settlement for eternity, made him sad. He had mistaken the way. He had labored, and prayed, and fasted, and done many good works; he had done all but the one thing,—he had not taken Christ. He had not counted all things but loss for Christ; he had not rested his soul on the one resting-place. His life had been a life of doing, but not of believing; of doubting, not of trusting; and "he was confounded *because he had hoped*." He might have had Christ many years ago, but he preferred his own plan, and continued his laborious efforts to recommend himself to God by his devotions and doings. The peace he had been working for had not come; and the peace for which the Son of God had wrought, and which He had finished for the sinner, he had not accepted.

It is one thing to hope, and it is another thing to hope well and truly. To hope aright is to hope according to what God has revealed concerning our future.

Much has been written of "the pleasures of hope"; and much that is true and beautiful has been said of these "pleasures"; for they are many, and man clings to them even in the days of darkness and despair. It is not a wrong thing to hope. God has put hope in every human breast; and the Book of God dwells much upon it, and upon "the things hoped for." It is "good that a man should hope," said the prophet. "Hope on, hope ever," are the expressive words of a motto which has cheered many. Hope is "the anchor of the soul," and is frequently, in pictures, and devices, and emblems, thus set forth,—an anchor firmly fixed on the solid shore, and holding fast a vessel beaten by wind and wave.

But, in order to be the anchor of the soul, hope must be something surer and better than what man usually calls by that name. For man's hopes are often but his own wishes and fancies; and even when they go beyond these, and occupy themselves with what is really true and lawful, they are not to be trusted, and they endure but for a season. They disappoint, but do not fill. They cheat and mock him who trusts them. They abide not, but depart, leaving behind them only a void and aching heart.

They fall to pieces of themselves, even when no hand touches them, and no storm crushes them. They are not to be trusted for a day. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity."

One August evening, just before sunset, we saw a rainbow suddenly appear. It seemed to rise out of the dark clouds that hung in the sky, and drew our eyes by its completeness; for nothing seemed wanting either in color or in position, to its perfection. But if it was one of the brightest, it was also one of the briefest we had ever seen. It had scarcely taken its place on the cloud when it disappeared. That fair bow was like man's hope, as brief as it was bright, as disappointing as it was promising. It melted off the sky, though no hand touched it, and no tempest shook it, leaving nothing behind but the cheerless cloud, which it had for a few moments brightened. "What is man?" it said. What are man's hopes, and joys, and plans? They rise and fall; they come and go; they shine, and then return into darkness. "The things that are seen are temporal."

We remember one peculiar day in the desert of Sinai,—a day not exactly of rain, but of showers, with clear sunshine between. Over some high black rocks to the left of us thin mists hung, or rather rapidly passed

across the brown precipices. On these, rainbow after rainbow formed itself in beautiful succession; six or seven of these suddenly shining out, and then disappearing, one after another,—the brightest yet frailest things we had ever seen; so like what is real and abiding, yet so unreal and perishable. How like they were to the dreams and hopes of man, disappointing and cheating human hearts with unsubstantial beauty! To such dreams and hopes the poor heart clings, not in youth merely, but to old age; and by means of these vain brightnesses is drawn away from Him who is brighter than all earthly brightnesses,—the “brightness of Jehovah’s glory and the express image of His person; whose glory changes not; who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.”

O man, when wilt thou be wise, and fix thine eye only on that which endureth for ever; on that which will fill thy heart and gladden thy soul to all eternity?

There was an old Scottish family, to whom belonged large estates, and who had lived together for many years in unbroken completeness. One evening they gathered all together, with relatives and friends,—father, mother, sisters, cousins, with the heir of the estate as the centre of the happy circle. That evening was among the last of the completeness. Within a few years all was changed, and each member of that circle, that had sat in gladness round the family hearth, was gathered into the family vault. The estate passed into other hands, and the old trees waved over other heads. The hopes that shone in each face that evening were speedily crushed, and the frailty of earth’s fairest faces and fondest affections was sadly shown. We never look upon that old family mansion without calling to mind some text that tells of the vanity of human expectations. In a dying world like this, we need a sure and undying hope.

It is written, “Thou destroyest the hope of man.” Yes, even so. Not only does man’s hope fall to pieces of itself, but God destroys it before its time. It springs up in a night, and withers in a night, because God smites it. Man cannot be trusted here with the endurance of any earthly things. They become idols, and must be broken; for “the idols He will utterly abolish.” Our cherished hopes of a bright future here—of a long life, of health, of comfort, of money, of prosperity—must be checked, else we should make earth our home and our heaven, forgetting the glory to be revealed, and the pleasures that are at God’s right hand for ever. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.”

But God quenches no hope without presenting a brighter one,—one that will last for ever; for He does not mock the creature that he has made, nor wither up his fairest flowers without a reason, and that reason fraught both with wisdom and with love. He cares for us. He yearns over us. He would fain make us happy. He loves us too well to cheat us with dreams.

Man’s hope must be destroyed, that *God’s* hope may be built upon its ruins. The human is swept away only that the divine may come in its stead. The temporal is in mercy wrested from our grasp, that the eternal may be our portion and inheritance.

There is, then, that which God calls “the BETTER hope,”—a hope full of immortality; a hope which God Himself gives, and of which no man can rob us. It is divine and everlasting. It brings with it the peace which passeth all understanding; and it contains in it the joy unspeakable and full of glory. No disappointment in it, and no mockery! It is sure and glorious, like Him from whom it comes to us. It is connected with a crown, with an inheritance, with a kingdom, with a glory which fadeth not away, with an eternity of joy such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.

The hope which God sets before us is no doubtful thing, but sure and glorious. It rests upon His gospel, in believing which we become men of hope.

For nothing save a believed gospel can give us aught of hope,—at least of that which God calls by that name. A believed gospel brings us peace; and, with the peace, it brings us hope. The peace is sure and steadfast; so also is the hope it brings.

This gospel is the good news concerning Him who died and was buried and rose again. The thirty-three years between His cradle and His cross embrace the whole compass of the good news. The story of His birth, and life, and death, contains all we need to know for peace. Into the soul of him who receives that divine story this peace enters, and, there it makes its abode,—peace in believing, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. “To him that worketh not, but believeth” (Rom 4:5), this peace belongs; and he who has the peace has the hope,—a hope that maketh not ashamed.

Blessed union of peace and hope! We cannot have the hope without the peace, and we cannot have the peace without the hope (Rom 5:1,2). The belief of the good news makes us partakers of both.

Herein is love! For thus we see God providing not only for our present, but for our future, setting before our eyes a crown and kingdom, and meanwhile giving us peace with Himself here on earth until that kingdom come. Herein is love! For thus we see God in His pity drying up our earthly wells, and at the same time opening for us the wells of salvation,—“the fountain of the water of life.”

Lift up thine eyes, O man, and look unto that future which lies before you! What is it to be? Dark or bright? Your life is but a vapor. Will you not make sure of the life everlasting? It is within your reach. It is pressed upon your acceptance by Him who came to give hope to the hopeless, life to the dead, peace to the troubled, rest to the weary. That which He did in dying on the cross is that which you have to rest upon for eternity. It is a sure resting-place. You need no other. He that believeth entereth into REST!

Yes; and he that believeth enters into a new life, and begins a holy walk,—a life and a walk corresponding to the faith which realizes both the grace of the Cross and the glory of the kingdom. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”; and that same Holy Spirit who drew him to the Cross, is given him that he may follow Christ, and be holy as He was holy.