

HOPE OF THE CHURCH

(Discourse by W. J. Thorne, Portland, Maine, in 1915 Convention Supplement Report, beginning on page 85.)

Dear friends, in line with the subject for today, "Hope," we will take our text from Rom. 8:20, "*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same, in hope.*"

From our text we gather the thought that there may be two ways of taking it. First: God subjected the creature or permitted the creature to come under the power of sin for a wise purpose. Second: The creature Adam, the representative head of the race, through disobedience subjected the whole race to the condition of death. We do not read that they were subjected to an eternity of torture for this disobedience, but rather from the standpoint of God's plan as we see it now and according to the text, the whole creation was subjected to the power of death, but in hope.

Then verse 21 tells us what the hope is, because the creature itself, referring to the whole groaning creation (humanity) will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Here we have a plain statement in regard to man's final restoration to human perfection, as enjoyed in the garden of Eden before the Fall.

We will next notice the word "Hope." It is one of the three great things mentioned by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 13:13: "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest is love." "Hope" then signifies the confident expectation of the things promised. The desire for good accompanied by expectation; to cherish the desire for good. Anticipation, e.g., we hoped to get to this convention and have been looking forward to it with anticipation. And now that we are at the convention we have realized our hope. We, however, remember the Apostle's statement that "faith without works is dead", and so we arranged all our affairs and got busy getting ready to go and here we are no longer hoping to be at the convention but really here now. So with the Great Convention which we hope to reach in God's due time if faithful. It is not enough to wish and hope to get there but the question is, am I on the way now and if we press along earnestly and zealously following all the guide posts as directed in God's word the Lord will see that we shall surely get there. There would have been many more at this convention, but they were not able to come because of finances, etc., but let us remember, dear friends, that all who really want to get to the great convention, that the fare is paid for each one and a through ticket is provided and there will be no need of a return ticket, for when we get there and are with the Lord, the promise is that we will abide there forever. That will be "Home, Sweet Home."

In a sense the world has no hope or expectation of receiving any blessing from God. They know not what blessed things God has in reservation for them because their minds are alienated from God by sin and wicked works. In that same sense we as the people of God also at one time were without God and without hope in the world, as St. Paul states in Eph. 2:11-13, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

The Scriptures teach us there is not only a hope for the Church, the true Church, which in the Scriptures is called the Church of the Living God composed of all saintly believers in all denominations, and outside of them, all who are following in Jesus' footsteps, but the selection of this Church is with an end in view, viz., the blessing of the whole world of mankind through this Church when glorified, and united to her Lord and Head on the spiritual plane. We are further told that this Church reigning with Christ will constitute with her Head, the Kings and Priests who are to reign over the whole world. Then the Hope of the Church is that she may be like her Lord as St. Paul tells us, speaking of the Church he says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be [like] but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

We surely agree with the apostle that such a glorious hope as this should have the effect of purifying us and making us more and more like the great Pattern, our Lord Jesus. We notice that this hope of the church is not that she shall be like unto the angels. That would be very wonderful indeed, more than we could ask or think or expect. We remember when we were connected with the nominal church systems that we used to sing:

"I want to be an Angel
And with the Angels stand,
A crown upon my forehead
And a harp within my hand."

We do not sing that any more because we know better. Many Christians believe that Jesus has the same human body, only that some change occurred, and they say that it has been glorified. They believe that it has the same scars and that these are really more manifest because that body shines with glory. If this were the case it would make the scars more marked, and what a spectacle that would be both to God and the angels. Then

if, as the Apostle says, that we, the church, shall be like Him, then we too will have the same human bodies with all the marks or scars attaching to them, and that also would be a dreadful spectacle and would surely make heaven a very unhappy place.

In Heb. 1:3, it is stated that Jesus “is the express image of the Father’s person,” being made *so much better than the angels* as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name (position) than they. The Church will bear His name, His nature and His heavenly glory. This is the hope of the Church. Most Christian people do not seem to realize that the Scriptures hold out the thought that there is a hope for the world, that is, those who will not be of the Church class but the hope of the world and the hope of the Church are two different things altogether. The hope of the world, so the Scriptures declare, is a restitution or restoration of that which was lost, namely an earthly inheritance, and St. Peter states, Acts 3:19-21, what is the hope of the world. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of the refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” This hope will be realized by the world at the second advent of Christ.

Coming back to the hope of the Church, we find that the Scriptures state that it was God’s object to give this offer to the Jews first, viz.: to become members of the Messiah or Christ’s Body. We remember the words of our Lord when he sent out his disciples, “I am not sent to any but the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” therefore “go not to any of the Gentiles, but rather to the house of Israel,” not even to your near by neighbors, the Samaritans. At first, we are inclined to ask the question: why did not the Lord send this message to all the world? Is it because he did not love them? We know this could not be the case, because He said “I lay down My life for the world.” John 3:16 also corroborates that: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” However, as we understand the matter now, we see that God has a wonderful plan, and that plan was that during the Gospel age, God purposed the selecting of the Church. This Church as we now see it was at first intended to be selected from among the Jews. God has been dealing with that nation for nearly nineteen centuries, and it was reasonable to suppose that after dealing with that nation for so long a period they would have been fully prepared to receive the Messiah and this wonderful call to the divine nature, extended to them by the Father through Christ. We are told that only a remnant was ready to receive Him. Nevertheless, we are greatly surprised to find that according to the record, up to the time of the end of the last week of their favor, about twenty-five thousand seemed to be in a state of readiness to receive the call; but that was not the number designated by the Lord. In Rev. 7:14 the number is stated to be 144,000.

In Rom. 11:11 the Apostle raises the question, “Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.” “Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the

diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify my office.” We find therefore, as God did not find a sufficient number in Israel who were in readiness of heart to receive the call, and proving themselves unworthy of a continuance of that great favor, then God declared through the Apostle to them, “Seeing ye judge yourselves unworthy, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” In Acts 15:14-18 we read, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.” This has been the work of the Gospel age, during all this period we read that “blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” The fact that we see the blindness already beginning to depart from Israel is a positive proof that the full number has been about completed.

We now are able to understand so much better what the Apostle Paul means when he says concerning the Church: Heb. 11:40, “God having provided some better thing for us,” that is, something good for the world, something better for the Church. We notice that the promises to the Church are all heavenly (1 Pet. 1:4) The Apostle there speaks of the inheritance of the Church: “To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God.” But for the world a different hope is held out. The promises to the world are of an earthly nature. Psalm 115:15, 17, “The heaven of heavens is the Lord’s, but the earth hath He given to the children of men.” The thought evidently is that this is to be their everlasting possession. We no longer believe the teaching that earth is to be destroyed by fire, nor in any manner, for in Isa. 45:18 we read, “For thus saith the Lord who created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth; He hath established it; He created it not in vain; He formed it to be inhabited.” Ecc. 1:4, “One generation may come and another may go, but the earth abideth forever.” God made man then to live on the earth, and when He is restored to the condition from which he fell originally, it is declared that then this earth shall become once more a beautiful paradise and every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree. They shall build houses and not another inhabit them. When God’s plans are completed, it will be found that those selected from among the world during this Gospel age, all these saintly ones will be glorified on the heavenly plane, and all the willing and obedient among mankind during the millennium will be restored to the perfect human nature, and all the willfully disobedient will be destroyed in the second death. By that time all tears will be wiped away; there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things shall have passed away. Rev. 21:4, 5.

When the millennial age is fully inaugurated the Scriptures reveal that Jerusalem will become the great Capital of the world, and then many nations shall come and say, “Come,

let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for the law shall go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Micah 4:2) When Israel has been fully recovered from her blindness, then God declares that he will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall “look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” (Zech. 12:10) This latter prophecy may have a literal fulfillment, and possibly the body of Jesus, which was put to death, having been preserved by Jehovah, may be reproduced and lie in state in the world’s great Capital, Jerusalem, and thus literally Israel will look upon him. If this would be the case, what a wonderful memorial this would be of God’s love and of Christ’s love also for the world. What a wonderful testimony throughout all the ages to all God’s creatures everywhere throughout the universe, of the great love of God and Christ who died for the human race.

We wish to notice that this hope should bring us great joy. Rom. 5:1-5 states: “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.” The 5th verse tells that this hope maketh us not ashamed. Heb. 6:19: “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.” We believe that we shall very soon realize this hope, as our Lord says: “When ye see all these things begin to come to pass, then know that your redemption [deliverance] draweth nigh.” The Apostle Peter also exhorts us to hope to the end, that is, do not give up, but realizing that God has promised grace sufficient for all our needs, we may realize by His grace the fruition of our hope.

“BE STRONG BELOVED”

and grant Me the full measure of thy trust: thine heart is known, thou lovest Me and yearnest to attain the blest fruition of thy longed-for hope. I am for thee God’s richest gift, the dearest treasure of His heart slain upon earth’s altar, but now enthroned with glorious might. Take courage! Fear not the terrors that beset earth’s dark night of sin. No evil can befall those cherished hearts who joy to do the Father’s will. Make known His praise and Kingdom powers! Soon thou shalt be called to scenes far surpassing human aim or thought! Soon thou shalt be with Me in My throne from whence flows the living streams to bless mankind. The morning dawns—the darksome night will now give place to DAY! Press on, beloved, be strong! (Psalm 27:14; John 15; Psalm 91)
(— Frederick Lardent, London 1885-1970)