

## Greenway's Benefice Weekly Devotional (No. 30)

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020

### Bible Readings:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and Psalm 46:1-11

### Authentic Hope

*"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

*"Therefore we will not fear..." Psalm 46:1*

"I hope..." How often in conversation do we begin a sentence with these or similar words? What do we mean when we say "I hope..." in such statements as: "I hope the sun will shine for my picnic" – "I hope I won't miss the bus" – "I hope I'll pass my exams" – "I hope life will get easier soon"?

That little word, which is so important in the Christian context, has been weakened in our every-day usage to mean little more than "wishful thinking". A popular dictionary defines hope as "a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen."

The Hebrew and Greek equivalent of our English word "hope" has the meaning of a "confident expectation" – a stark contrast with the popular usage of "wishful thinking."

But even a confident expectation is only as reliable as the foundation on which it is built. If we are going on a journey we have a "confident expectation" that our bus or train will arrive on time – but as we all may have experienced, it may not, for all manner of reasons.

Jesus told a parable about two builders – one built his house on sand, the other on a rock. We all know the story, I'm sure. We may all think the man who built on sand was an idiot – but he must have had some confidence in what he was doing, otherwise he wouldn't have gone to all that trouble! His problem was he had put his confidence and hope in something unreliable.

Every day, we're encouraged to put our trust in all manner of things, from products and ideas to lucky charms, astrology, philosophies and even people. But Scripture is clear that, as believers, we are called to put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ and in him alone. He alone is the unshakeable foundation for our lives. As we often sing:

*In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song;*

*This Cornerstone, this solid Ground, Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.*

In our passage from 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is teaching these young-in-the-faith Christians about hope, particularly in relation to their confusion over the second coming of Jesus. It is a key theme in the New Testament, mentioned over 300 times - so Paul regarded hope as essential teaching for new Christians, as indeed it is for all of us.

We are living in a world that is filled with uncertainties and fears at the moment. The return of Jesus Christ is the Christian's ultimate hope, because we can be sure that, no matter what may happen in the world or in our lives, our future is ultimately secure in Jesus.

The Thessalonians were evidently confused over this, mainly because of the prevalent Greek society's attitude to death. Their philosophers wrote things like *"There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope."* and *"When once our brief life sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep."*

So these Thessalonian Christians assumed that when members of their church died, they would miss out on Christ's return. So Paul writes to reassure them that they should not grieve in the same way as those who have no hope (i.e. unbelievers), for when Jesus returns, those who have died "in Christ" will actually be the very first to meet him! They will rise first, followed closely by those who are still alive.

In the Bible, the word "hope" is the confident expectation of what God has promised, and its strength is in His faithfulness. When we trust in God, our hope is secure because He never fails. When God says something in his Holy Word, He WILL do it!

Our second reading is Psalm 46. Read it whenever you are feeling afraid!

*"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the sea..."*

I'd like to end by quoting part of an old hymn from the Victorian era. Yes, the words and thought patterns may seem dated, but the truths expressed are bang up to date and highly relevant to living amongst the hopeless state of today's world.

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.*

When darkness veils His lovely face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace;  
In every high and stormy gale,  
My anchor holds within the veil.

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.

When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
Oh, may I then in Him be found;  
In Him, my righteousness, alone,  
Faultless to stand before the throne.

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Edward Mote 1797-1874

### **So let us reflect and pray.**

Loving Lord, we thank you that in all the turbulence and fear in today's world, you are our unchangeable, immovable, solid rock. In our Lord Jesus Christ you have given a hope that is steadfast and certain.

May we daily live in the light and strength of that sure hope, so that our lives may radiate the peace of Jesus, and shine as a beacon in the needy world and community around us. Amen.

God bless – and keep trusting in THE solid rock, our Lord Jesus himself!

Dave Kilmister