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Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“NEW HOPE” (Part 1)
First Corinthians 15:1-25, 58

☑ A person {Anon} “can live about 40 days without food, about 3 days without water, about 8 minutes without air, but only for 1 second without hope.”

◆ We need hope, true hope!

△ True hope, announces Hosea 2:15, is a “**door.**” It opens us up to purpose and wholeness.

△ True hope, declares Hebrews 6:19, is “**an anchor for the soul.**” It secures our hearts in the storms of life.

△ True hope, says 1st Thessalonians 5:8, is “**a helmet.**” It guards the mind in spiritual battle.

We need hope that is true, fully true.

◆ What is more, we need substantial hope that focuses primarily on God’s glory, and secondarily on my happy ending; that gets me through hardship *and* equips me to help *others* in their struggles; that inspires me to change this world rather than escape to the next.

☹ But the hope of many believers is insubstantial and only half true -- especially in regard to eternity.

Consider: why did Jesus die on the cross? Surveys indicate that the typical American Christian will say something like: “Jesus died so we can go to Heaven.”

Consider: what is the point of salvation? The typical response: “The point is to receive God’s blessings here on earth, then go to Heaven.”

☹ The typical American Christian hope is mostly about *my* happy ending, getting *me* through hard times, and hanging on until Christ rescues me from The Late, Great Planet Earth. It is insubstantial.

☹ Not only so, it is only partly true. It is incomplete. It is not the whole teaching of Scripture.

† But what about texts like Php 3:20, which clearly states that “**our citizenship is in heaven**”?

Philippi was a Roman colony. It was built to extend Roman influence, and the emperor expected his colonists to fulfill their mandate. Moving back to the capital city was not in the job description.

So when Paul calls us citizens of Heaven he is saying that God has commissioned his people to build outposts of his kingdom right here.

† But what about texts like Hebrews 13:14: “**For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come**”?

Notice, it is “**The city that is to come**” not “the city to which we are to go.” For now the {Rev 21:2} “**new Jerusalem**” is out there; but in God’s perfect timing it will come “**down out of heaven**” for permanent relocation on this planet (Revelation 21:2, 10).

⊛ Scripture does teach that Heaven *is* where God’s people go after death; but only temporarily. At Christ’s return Heaven and Earth will be joined, and *this* planet will be our home forever. Therefore, Paul declares in Romans 8:21, “**creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.**”

Jesus died so we can be Kingdom citizens who extend his influence in this world. The point of salvation is reconciliation with God who gives us Heaven and much more beyond that.

This is far richer, deeper, wider and fuller than the incomplete hope of “going to heaven when we die.” It has momentous repercussions for mission, stewardship, worship and spirituality.

Do not take my word for it. Let’s examine Scripture, specifically First Corinthians 15 {p 1,173}.

□ In vv 1-11 the apostle restates the core Gospel tenets. Vv 3-5a: **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins ... he was buried... he was raised on the third day... and ...he appeared to”** many. The church in Corinth affirms this Gospel, yet their hope is seriously compromised by half truths and falsehoods.

□ Paul names the problem in v 12: **“If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”**

An ancient Greek proverb said that **“The body is a tomb.”** The pagan Greek hope was to shed the body, escape this world, and spend eternity as an ethereal soul. Likewise, these Christians believe the afterlife is only for the soul. They claim that, with the exception of Jesus, the dead are not physically raised.

□ What’s so wrong with that? Paul details the implications of their false hope in vv 13-19:

A) V 13 ~ **“If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.”** The past bodily resurrection of Jesus and the future bodily resurrection of his Followers cannot be separated;

B) V 14 ~ **“If Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”** The faith depends on the corporeal resurrection of Jesus;

C) V 15 ~ **“More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God.”** Refute the resurrection and the entire apostolic message is nullified;

D) Vv 16-17 ~ **“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.”** Invalidate the physical resurrection and every other blessing of salvation – reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sin, and a transformed life – is negated.

Death does not mean saying goodbye to Earth forever and enjoying a purely spiritual existence in Heaven. If there is no bodily resurrection for us, the Gospel has *no* substance and we are more pitiful than all others (v 19).

□ In vv 20-28 Paul outlines Christian hope that is wholly true and substantial:

A) **“Christ has indeed been raised from the dead”** (v 20); and,

B) He is **“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”** (also v 20). **“Firstfruits”** is farming jargon. It means the portion of the crop that ripens first or is of the highest quality. It is a guarantee of the full harvest still to come. In other words, Jesus is {NCV} **“proof that those who sleep in death will also be raised”**;

C) **“For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive”** (vv 21-23); and,

D) Vv 24-25 ~ **“Then the end”** (literally, the goal) **“will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father *after* he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign *until* he has put all his enemies under his feet.”** Christ is dismantling the kingdom of this world and replacing it with God’s kingdom. When He is finished He will hand it over to his Father.

☼ Jesus **is** building his kingdom right now, here on Earth. V 25 does not read, **“He must reign *when*”**; it says, **“He must reign *until*...”**

The consummation of the Kingdom will trigger Christ’s 2nd Coming, which will trigger the resurrection of our bodies, which will trigger the joining of Heaven and Earth as the New Jerusalem comes down.

So as wonderful as Heaven is, it is only a rest stop, a way station. It is not our ultimate hope.

☼ Our truest hope, which is biblically complete and substantial, is the consummation of God's Kingdom and our bodily resurrection. It is the fulfillment of the words we pray so often {Mt 6:10}: **“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Consequently:

✦ When we make a new disciple, the consummation and resurrection draw nearer.

✦ When we help each other obey Jesus, the consummation and resurrection draw nearer.

✦ When we embody the Beatitudes recorded in Mt 5, the consummation and resurrection draw nearer.

✦ When we feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, or visit the prisoner for the Lord's sake, the consummation and resurrection draw nearer.

✦ When we invest time, energy, money, prayer, devotion and obedience in God's Kingdom, the consummation and resurrection draw nearer.

I am not saying that we can usher in the Kingdom. All the Christ Followers in the world combined cannot do that. Sin, the devil, and death are far too obstinate and fierce for us to overcome.

Yet they are no match for Christ Jesus! And He has chosen us to be his holy instruments, his sanctified tools for building his Kingdom.

☐ Do not take my word for it! First Corinthians 15 ends with these words in v 58 ~ **“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”**

Our **“labor in the Lord is not in vain”!**

I invite, urge and challenge us to discard insubstantial, half-true hopes, and to embrace the hope that is biblically complete and substantial: the hope of bodily resurrection.

First Corinthians 15 is the word of the Lord.