

Hope that Gives Strength for Our Labor

Thomas Robinson, *Living in Hope 2*, May 1, 2011

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.** ⁵³ For this perishable **body** must put on the **imperishable**, and this mortal **body** must put on **immortality.** ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ **Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

Ephesians 1:16-20

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, **that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,** ¹⁹ and what is the **immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,** according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he **worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead** and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places

Romans 8:11, 14-16

¹¹ And if the **Spirit** of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who **raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.** ...

¹⁴ For those who are **led by the Spirit of God** are the **children of God.** ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does **not** make you **slaves**, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, *“Abba, Father.”* ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Romans 15:13

¹³ May the **God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may **overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

2 Corinthians 5:4-6a

⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened – not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, **who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.** ⁶ So we are always of good courage. ...

Future Hope and Everyday Life

We have just celebrated Easter. A past event and present reality. The past event – Jesus’ resurrection – was the future of the world coming into the present. Permanent meaning. Early Christians experienced that transforming power: The future becoming present in their lives. That continues to be what changes our lives – a living hope that renews our minds and shapes everyday life. What you believe about your future shapes how you live. Hope is the word for this presence of the future. Not a sense of uncertainty, but the realization that we have been given a piece of the future in Jesus and his resurrection. The reality revealed is where we are going and we live toward that reality. We live day by day in a working world, sometimes frustrating, sometimes satisfying. When we talk about hope and resurrection it may seem far removed from the struggles of work life. May Day, struggle for 8-hour work day in 19th cent. Often Christian hope has been portrayed as turning people away from real life. Marx substituted the secular hope of a state controlled by workers. Still hope-driven. Hope disappointed. Postmodern critique: there is no hope, no purpose, no direction, no meaning. The Gospel says Yes! The end of 1 Cor 15 (focused on the resurrection) shows how the distinct hope of faith in Jesus gives strength for everyday life and all kinds of work, building toward that future. The hope is holistic: physical and spiritual truly united. It is both individual/personal and communal/universal, shared with God’s renewal of his whole creation.

The Holy Spirit, Power, and the Future

The very heart of Christian faith is that God is our creator and creator of the whole universe and has become deeply involved in our world in Jesus. God takes on flesh, becomes part of the physical world, lives beautifully, carries our pain, sin, brokenness into death, conquers death, is raised to new physical life in the resurrection, is exalted. But it doesn’t stop there. Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to you as a believer. Very personal. The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of the future, here and now in our lives, the embodiment of hope (Rom 8; 2 Cor 5). The hope is rooted in a new relationship, we are adopted as children of God in intimate relationship – “*Abba, Father.*” Known and loved. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God’s power and purpose in our lives. God knows our weakness and helps us moment by moment. We learn to live without fear, with joy and boldness, not from our strength but trusting in his powerful life living in us.

Opening our Minds and Hearts to Hope

Paul’s prayer in Eph 1: “*that you may know the hope to which he has called you.*” He prays for wisdom, revelation, knowledge, real enlightenment, in order for this hope to come to full power. The hope is a future created by God into which we are called. But that future is created by God because of the value he sees in you as his creation: “*his glorious inheritance*” in those who trust in Jesus. We listen to other voices: we are entirely material; mind/self is illusion; unimportant, momentary; values are arbitrary. Gospel: You were created out of God’s love for an eternal and personal life of love with him. God has a future for you, glimpsed in power when he raised Jesus from the dead.

Working in the Light of Hope

Jesus in his teaching and serving shows us the values and inner dynamic of that future. We cannot create it ourselves by our power. But we are called to work toward it, in congruity with it, shaped by the values of the Gospel – “*all that I have commanded.*” Not just religious work but all our work has significance. When we are in the Lord, every part of our labor flows into that future, renewed, exalted. Nothing is lost, in vain.