

Article - Hope Can be Difficult

Hope can be a difficult thing to keep alive. We all struggle to keep an optimistic outlook. Not all that we hope for is realised and seen in our lifetimes. Disappointment guts the heart of our hope. We assume that what is unrealised in our time is unrealised forever. We strain to see beyond today, let alone years into the future. Even the ancients, the writer to the Hebrews tells us, “*died in faith, not having received the things promised.*” Yet the writer also tells us that they saw them and greeted them “*from afar*” (Heb. 11:13). Faith must see things as God sees them, from His perspective, in the context of eternity. Thus, the Word to which faith clings upholds faith with heaven-born promises anchored in the eternal Christ.

Abraham, who received a promise of his own much like Zechariah’s, faced the same seemingly unbelievable possibility of fulfilment. Paul tells us that “*in hope he believed against hope*” (Rom. 4:18). His body was “*as good as dead*” given his advanced age of about a hundred years. Sarah’s womb, like Elizabeth’s, was barren. No earthly hope. Yet faith believed against that dead-ended hope. It hoped based entirely upon what God could do, anchored in His word of assurance. No distrust could shake Abraham, because he was “*fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised*” (Rom. 4:19, 21).

Many of our hopes come from mere wishes and desires for temporary enjoyments. As we get older, we understand how to handle the disappointments that come when they are not realised; so our hopes are conditioned. You just know some things are no more than wishful thinking with little basis in reality. But some of our hopes arise out of moments of crushing crises like serious sickness and impending death. We need certain hopes to come true. We try to hope when calamity strikes and leaves our lives in shambles and shattered fragments. We pray fervently. We hope with every fibre of our spirit. We try to hang on to optimism despite repeated disappointments. Time passes. Hours turn into days. Days turn into weeks. Weeks turn into years. How long can we hope?

But hope born of faith fights doubts only when it is anchored in Christ. And such hopes transcend our own limited desires. Zechariah and Elizabeth could hardly imagine how their long-hoped-for son would become the very forerunner of God’s own Son. They would learn that when God sends a heavenly messenger like Gabriel from the very presence of God Himself, the promise will not be the foundation of small and limited hopes. You and I, as those baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ, live within great and grand hopes, Christ-filled hopes, hopes that concern the defeat of death and the gift of abundant life. Gabriel’s message therefore comes also to us, concerns each of us in our own disappointments. Look beyond this moment, the messenger tells us. Look beyond your own personal and limited desires. Look to the larger story, the greater plan. Look to the grand plans God has for you in Christ’s death and resurrection, plans like those announced to the prophet Jeremiah in his own difficult times: “*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I shall hear you. You will seek Me and find Me*” (Jer. 29:11-13). Yes, God has plans for each of us as well. And these plans in Christ are for our greater good, a good we often cannot even begin to imagine in the darkness of our struggles.