

STUDIES ON HOPE



SEVEN STUDIES ON HOPE

By Rob Taylor

1. PSALM 33

1. The Psalm begins with praise and a focus on the greatness of God. In your experience, how is worship linked to hope?
2. Verse 13 speaks of the Lord looking down on all humanity, and again in verse 18 the Psalmist speaks of the eyes of the Lord being on his people. How does this assurance of God's seeing his people, strengthen a sense of hope?
3. Think of a time when you waited on the Lord. What did you learn through the experience? Why is it important to be both confident in the Lord and patient?
4. What things help us know that the Lord's unfailing love is with us as we wait in hope?
5. How does the Psalmist's assurance in verses 20-22 reassure your heart in the light of things you are facing?

2. ISAIAH 40:27-31

1. In your experience, what are the things that make us weary and sap our strength? What are the things that renew our strength and energy?
2. The Children of Israel were complaining and saying, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God." How does that complaining attitude make it much more difficult to wait on the Lord in hope?
3. In Psalm 33 we saw how the Psalmist began by recalling the glory of God. In verse 27, how does losing sight of who God is create the condition of discouragement? Can you think of an example?
4. How does hope in the Lord renew our strength when we are weary?
5. In what aspects of your life at present do you need to look to the Lord to renew your strength?

3. ROMANS 4:18-5:5

1. Abraham hoped in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence. What is the link between faith and hope? How do we tell the difference between presumption and genuine hope-filled faith?
2. Just as there is a link between hope and faith, so there is a link also with the promises of God. What are some of the promises of God we can be holding on to in faith and hope through these days?
3. Paul moves from Abraham to the secure standing we have through what Jesus has accomplished for us. As you think about the work of Christ, what are some of the ways it gives us a strong hope?
4. How is it possible to hope in the glory of God in the midst of suffering?
5. Thinking of your own experience, how have you known God's love being poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit, and how does that link to a hope that does not disappoint us?

4. ROMANS 8:18-27

1. Maintaining hope in seasons of difficulty can be hard. How does what Paul says in verse 18 help to give us perspective?
2. How does Paul set about describing the mixture of eager anticipation and deep frustration, even to the point of "groaning" that pervades all creation? What causes this state of affairs?
3. Having mentioned the groaning of creation, Paul says that we also, as people who "have the firstfruits of the Spirit" groan inwardly with longing. In what ways do you personally identify with what Paul speaks of? How does this deepen our understanding of the New Testament concept of hope?
4. To what extent do you agree with Paul's words, "if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (verse 25)?
5. The final section of this reading speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us hold onto and express hope in tough situations. How does the Spirit do this, and how have you known his help in your life?

5. HEBREWS 6:13-20

1. In our third study, from Romans 4, we looked at Abraham. Again in this passage we are directed to Abraham's example. Whereas Paul was pointing to Abraham's faith, the writer of Hebrews looks to the certainty of God's promise. Why is it amazing, in the first place, that God should bind himself by a promise to one of his creatures and, in the second place, that he should feel the need to confirm the certainty of his promise?
2. As you consider the place of hope in your life, how closely tied is it to the character and faithfulness of God?
3. This passage states that "God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear". What do you understand the unchanging nature of his purpose to be? How does that inform your own hope as a Christian?
4. What do you think the writer means by speaking of "we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us"? On what basis can we be "greatly encouraged"?
5. In what ways does the picture of hope as an anchor for the soul, secured in the very "Holy of Holies" in heaven, resonate with you?

6. HEBREWS 10:19-25

1. This passage picks up some of the themes from our previous study of Hebrews 6. Why does the writer of Hebrews place so much emphasis on the Holy of Holies (or the Most Holy Place), and how would this have resonated with his Hebrew audience?
2. What does it mean for you personally to have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus?
3. How does the description here of a sincere heart, full assurance of faith, and having our hearts and bodies washed (probably a reference to baptism), give strength and content to our Christian hope?
4. What is the essence of "holding unswervingly" to the hope we profess, and what are the factors influencing us to "swerve" from that hope?
5. How can we encourage and "spur one another on" to strengthen one another in living from a centre of hope? Have you experienced someone doing this for you?

7. 1 PETER 1:3-9

1. The powerful theme running through this opening section of 1 Peter is anticipation. What have been the seasons of strong anticipation in your life; and how did that anticipation tend to dwarf any other things that were going on?
2. What is the “living hope” that Peter speaks of, and how does this hope differ from any other form of hope?
3. Whatever is filling the current chapter of your life, it is not the final chapter. How does knowing that an imperishable inheritance is kept in heaven and shielded by God’s power for the day of your full salvation, serve to encourage and motivate you?
4. How do trials and difficulties play a necessary part in building a strong and authentic faith? Has suffering played a positive or negative role in your life?
5. Peter acknowledges the reality of our having to love and rely on a Saviour whom we have not actually seen. Does that make it harder for us to hope in him?
6. Yet, though we don’t see him, it doesn’t diminish the knowledge that we are receiving the “end result of our faith” which is the salvation of our souls. How is that a reality in your life, and in what ways is it producing in you “an inexpressible and glorious joy”?