

## Hopeful Strangers and Sojourners

In previous editorials we have looked at who strangers and sojourners are; we have seen that as they live in the world they are guided by God's providence; and we have shown that in the biblical figure of strangers and sojourners there are two ways and two gates.

Strangers and sojourners are hopeful or hoping strangers and sojourners. More than anything else they are those who hope. Hope is their salient characteristic. If you ask, as we are doing, what a stranger and sojourner looks like, the answer is that they are those who hope. Above everything else they are hoppers (if I may use a word that isn't in the dictionary).

Hope is characteristic of our everyday lives. We use the word *hope* frequently in our conversation, both as a noun and as a verb. However, we do not use the term in quite the same way that the Bible does. Our use of the term usually indicates that something is possible, but maybe not probable, and surely not something that is certain. For example, we may say, "I hope I get an A on my biology test," when we have a sneaking suspicion that a C is much more likely. We mean that we would like to receive an A, but that this is doubtful. Or we may say, "If I ask the cute girl who always smiles at me for a date, I hope she accepts," we mean that she may say no, and we don't want to get turned down. So we hope, but we don't know.

These examples demonstrate two aspects of hope. One is desire. We want the A on the biology test, and we want the girl to accept a date. The other aspect is that of the future. While we may want the A and the date, we don't know if we will be successful in either instance. Why not? Because we are dealing with the future, and the future is by definition unknown and uncertain.

The biblical idea of hope is a bit different. It implies the elements of desire and of the future in the same way as our common use does, as demonstrated by the examples. However, in the scriptural idea of hope there is a third aspect, that of certainty. We must have clearly in our minds this threefold concept as it relates to our lives as strangers and sojourners.

First, hope always has to do with the future. It is obvious that hope is not concerned with the past, because the past is not unknown, but known, and it is gone. Nor is hope concerned with the present, for also the present is known. To continue the use of the examples, when you have already received a C on the biology test, it makes no sense to hope

for an A, and when the girl has accepted a date, it is unnecessary to hope that she will. So it is with the pilgrim's life. In Romans 8 the apostle Paul speaks of our future redemption. The idea of the future receives his emphasis as he describes that we, together with the whole creation, are waiting for and looking forward to the redemption of our bodies, which will take place in the future. In verse 24 he sums up this idea by saying that we are saved by hope. Then he says this: "But hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" When the future becomes a present reality, hope for the future is no longer necessary.

As strangers and sojourners we are traveling the narrow way that leads to the strait gate, and the strait gate opens into heaven. The goal of our lives is not the present world, but the eternal inheritance God has prepared for us. Clearly we have not yet reached our goal. If we have, there is no longer any point in hoping, as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Scripture everywhere associates hope with various aspects of the future. In Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 6:11, and 1 Peter 1:13 we read of hoping "to the end." Titus 1:2 and Titus 3:7 both speak of the hope "of eternal life," and in Titus 2:13 Paul connects hope with the appearing of Christ. Examples could be multiplied, but from these passages it is clear that our hope is concerned with the future. Implied is the question that you, young people, must face: For what do you hope? What is your goal—this world, or the world to come?

Second, hope implies a longing for its fulfillment. We hope for something that we very much want, something desirable to us. If you do not much care whether or not you get an A on the biology test, you have no desire, and you will be content with a C. If it does not matter to you if the attractive girl accepts a date, she is not the object of your desire, and you do not have a genuine hope of getting to know her.

Applied to our spiritual lives, hope means that we very much want the fulfillment of our life's journey. We want to enter the narrow gate that leads to eternal life, which is so wonderful that scripture describes it as something that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9). This desire determines that path of life that we walk—the narrow and difficult way that alone leads to the object of our hope, since the way and the end cannot be separated. We therefore face the question, What is our desire? What do we want? If our longing is for this world with all that it

includes, we will choose the wide and easy way that leads to destruction, and we will live accordingly. If we choose the narrow path, we will also live accordingly. What way are you walking? Do we want the pleasures and treasures of this world, which will give temporary satisfaction, but will soon pass away, or do we want the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away (1 Pet. 1:4)?

Third, hope is certainty. Here the biblical idea of hope differs from our use of the term. When we say, “I hope,” we indicate that we are uncertain. It is doubtful that you will receive an A on the test, and you are unsure that the girl will accept your request for a date. The scriptural meaning of hope is exactly the opposite. Hope is certainty. We may substitute “I know” for “I hope.” When we as believers say, “I hope I am going to heaven,” we do not mean, “I would like to go to heaven,” or, “I think I am going to heaven, but I am not sure,” but we mean, “I know I am going to heaven.” We have complete assurance that heaven is our home that lies just beyond the narrow gate.

The Bible uses hope in two ways.

In a subjective sense it refers to the act of hoping. Strangers and sojourners are those who hope. They are characterized by hope. We read in Psalm 31:24, “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.” In Psalm 33:22 believers ask, “Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.” To the Philippian church Paul writes concerning Timothy, “Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me” (Phil. 2:23).

In an objective sense hope is our goal. It is the content of our hope—what we hope for. In chapter 2 of his letter to Titus Paul teaches how we are to live in the world; part of this is that we are those who are “looking for that blessed hope.” For what do we hope? “The blessed appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Paul wants the eyes of the Ephesian Christians to be opened, that they may know what is the hope of their calling (Eph. 1:18). In Ephesians 4:4 he writes, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”

When we put these two ideas together, we have a picture of hoping strangers and sojourners. They have a goal toward which they are traveling, the content of which is described

as hope. That hope is the final fulfillment of our regeneration and calling, that is, our final salvation in the day of the Lord. For that hope we hope. Read that sentence again; it is not an error or a misprint. Hope is our objective, as well as an activity on our part, to which God calls us. Strangers and sojourners are not those who look for some kind of hypothetical, future hope; they are not those who await some sort of theoretical future blessedness that is possible but unlikely. They are those who live and walk in hope; their lives are governed by hope. It is impossible to separate the walk from the goal, the journey from its end.

Thus the idea of hope is intensely practical. Hope governs our lives, and by it we are ruled. Hope is not a matter of one's grade on a biology test or of a date that may or may not happen. Hope deals with our eternal destiny and the way to it. We cannot say that we hope for our salvation and then live like the devil.

Such is the negative idea of hope. Scripture speaks of those who have no hope. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul instructs the church concerning the matter of the saints who have died before Christ's return and in verse 13 contrasts them with those who have no hope of the resurrection: "But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." Those who are not strangers and sojourners have no hope. What a miserable thing it is to be hopeless! Such were we apart from our conversion, according to Paul in Ephesians 2:12: "Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." The Ephesians were strangers, but not in a good sense. Emphasizing that our hope is eternal, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

The contrast serves to drive home the point. We are strangers and sojourners by the grace of God according to his sovereign election. Therefore we are those who hope.

That we are "hoppers" implies the calling that Peter lays on us in 1 Peter 1:13: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Do you do this, young people? Are you hoppers?

How do we know that our spiritual hope is certain, unlike our earthly hope? Because God says so in Romans 5:5: "Hope maketh not ashamed. And because God says so, never will we be disappointed in our hope. When we walk as strangers and sojourners, we have the sure confidence that as we walk the difficult way of life in this world, our eternal inheritance awaits us.

Young people, are you hoping strangers and sojourners?