

Student Lesson 2.2

What Do We Hope For?

There has been a lot of confusion within the contemporary Christian faith about what the real hope of believers and the Church is. If you ask people in the Church what they hope for and what the purpose of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus accomplished, you will probably get as many responses as the people you question. Even more so, when asked about what the ultimate goal of the Church and individual believers, especially as it pertains to life after death, you will also receive a diversity of answers. *So what do we hope for as followers of Jesus and those who profess faith in the gospel?*



Q1: What is the goal of the Christian faith? In your own words, what do you believe to be the ultimate hope and purpose of believing in Jesus?

Q2: Interview at least five different people that you consider Christians using the questions in Q1. Bring your responses to your next small group.

Most of our understandings that pertain to the Christian hope revolve around the idea of some sort of heaven as a place one goes to when he or she dies and leaves this place called earth. As kids, many of us have had visions and illustrations both taught to us and conjured up by our own imaginations that incorporate a surreal place somewhere beyond the atmosphere, maybe able to be reached by a spaceship that travels past the great beyond (at least that's what I thought as a kid ☺). Read the following excerpt from a popular children's book and consider how this explanation compares or contrasts to the images you have of "heaven" and the supposed Christian hope:

“Heaven...is a beautiful place up in the sky, where no one is sick, where no one is mean or unhappy. It's a place beyond the moon, the stars, and the clouds. Heaven is where you go when you die...It's a beautiful place where you can sit on soft clouds and talk to other people who are there...If you're good throughout your life, then you get to go to heaven...When your life is finished here on earth, God sends angels down to take you up to Heaven to be with him.”¹

Q3: How does the above citation and illustration compare and contrast to the images you have of heaven and the supposed Christian hope?

Most of the concepts and notions that we have of heaven and the Christian hope do not give an honest reflection of what the Bible illustrates as the goal of the gospel and the anticipations of the Church. Even more so, if we read the Scriptures carefully, we will notice that many of the depictions of the Christian hope² are quite different and far more brilliant and beautiful than our cultural illustrations of a sweet by and by in the sky.

Q4: Read at least three of the following passages from the Bible. Write down key observations that concern what those who first penned and read Scripture, as well as those of us who read it today, are to hope for (be sure to note which ones you read so we can discuss them in our small groups):

- **Isaiah 2:1-4**
- **Isaiah 65:17-25**
- **John 20**
- **1 Corinthians 15**
- **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**
- **Philippians 3:7-16**
- **Revelation 21:1-5; 22-27**
- **Revelation 22:1-5**

¹ This long citation is taken from the children's book, *What's Heaven?*, written by Maria Shriver (St. Martin's Press, 1999).

² A great word to know, and one that you can throw around at parties, is *eschatology*. This term refers to a doctrine of the Church that engages and interacts with the Christian hope in future events that directly confront and challenge our activity in the present (see Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 1967, p. 16).

The Christian hope rests in the belief that the day is coming when Jesus will come again and make all things new and right. In other words, the Christian hope is for new creation. Moreover, the resurrection of Jesus is the first sign of God's work of new creation in that Jesus was raised from the dead as a reminder that death and decay, evil and injustice, suffering and pain, war and violence do not have the last word, rather life and rescue are God's constant and eternal word to and for the whole world.

Yet, we live in a world that does not appear to have been fully delivered or rescued. We do not have to look very far, maybe simply look into our own lives, and see that everything is not the way that it is supposed to be. Even more, it can often feel as though God is not only unconcerned, but also very much absent from real human sufferings and experiences. All of us, at some point in time, and maybe currently, have felt the effects of a world that is out of rhythm with its intended purposes. We may struggle with relationships, parents, school, self-image, fear, pressure, and all other sorts of chaotic experiences. We can also turn on the news or read the papers and encounter poverty, murder, genocide, homelessness, racism, and greed- all signs that the world is not right. As Christians, we live in tension with God's real promises for resurrection and new creation, as well as on-going reminders that the new creation is not fully here.

Q5: What do you make of this tension mentioned above? What about this causes you to struggle? What about this gives you hope? Read Psalm 13 and notice the tension sung about by the psalmist.



What is beautiful about the Christian hope is that it does not incorporate God's abandonment of the creation or humanity. Instead, the Kingdom of God, made real in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, enters into the mess of creation and restores it, renews it, and resurrects it. This is the good news, that through Jesus the whole of creation, including our individual lives, can anticipate the day when all will be well and right. This is what the early Christians and the Jewish tradition referred to as *shalom*, or peace and welfare.³

God's dreams for the world, dreams of new creation and *shalom*, then form God's people for mission in, to, and for the world. That is to say, we are called to practice the resurrection and inaugurate new creation⁴ in how we care for one another, serve one another, love one another, and remind one another that in Jesus death has lost its sting and new life is both already here and yet-to-come (1 Cor. 15:55-56). We are to be new creation people that hope for, not an escape to some world in the sky above the clouds, rather, a new heavenly city that comes down to this world and makes all things as they were intended from the beginning- good and filled with life. And in the middle of this new creation, this new city, God makes a home with God's people that wipes away all sorrow, pain, and injustice. May we live in anticipation of this day, confident and hopeful that Jesus' resurrection was only the beginning of the resurrection of all things!

Check out the songs

Surely We Can Change, by The David Crowder* Band: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuV5btFoZas>
Heaven by Gungor: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjQk9X6OrSY>

Q6: What about these songs relate to the Christian hope?

³ See *Seek the Peace of the City*, by Eldin Villafañe (Eerdmans, 1995).

⁴ For more study on Christian eschatology and hope read, *Surprised by Hope*, by N.T. Wright (Harper One, 2008).

Q1: What is the goal of the Christian faith? In your own words, what do you believe to be the ultimate hope and purpose of believing in Jesus?

Q2: Interview at least five different people that you consider Christians using the questions in Q1. Bring your responses to your next small group.

Q3: How does the above citation and illustration compare and contrast to the images you have of heaven and the supposed Christian hope?

Q4: Read at least three of the following passages from the Bible. Write down key observations that concern what those who first penned and read Scripture, as well as those of us who read it today, are to hope for (be sure to note which ones you read so we can discuss them in our small groups):

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- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- Philippians 3:7-16
- Revelation 21:1-5; 22-27
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Q5: What do you make of this tension mentioned above? What about this causes you to struggle? What about this gives you hope? Read Psalm 13 and notice the tension sung about by the psalmist.

Q6: What about these songs relate to the Christian hope?



The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.

Read begin to memorize the first portion of the Apostles Creeds which describes what the church believes about God.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.