

Do you have the hope of heaven?

I heard a great lesson on hope the other day. This is a subject that brings a great deal of comfort to God's children. When it comes to Biblical hope, we can also use the word *assurance*. Our hope of going to heaven is based upon evidence. This is why our expectation of heaven more than just wishful thinking.

Peter spoke on this subject: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undecaying and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," (1 Pet. 1:3-5).*

What a wonderful message! Knowing that Jesus resurrected from the dead, there is power through which we can obtain salvation by faith. This is clearly not a dead faith (Jas. 2:24-26) but rather a faith that obeys from the heart that form of doctrine (Rom. 6:17). Knowing that Christ did rise from the dead, we can be baptized into His death and bury our old man of sin and rise up in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-7). Having entered this new life, we can then walk in the light by striving to living faithfully until death (Rev. 2:10). We truly have a living hope.

In contrast to all of this, many "hope" to go to heaven like they hope they do not get cancer or hope they do not get into a car accident or face some other calamity. That is not the kind of hope we are talking about, yet many religious people have just that kind of hopelessness. They do not have a living hope based upon a strong feeling or desire. Jesus Himself said that this sort of faith would not make it to heaven (Matt. 7:21-23).

Having this assurance creates a confidence that Paul expressed in his final days where he said, ***"I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,"*** (1 Tim. 4:7). Like the many examples we can find in the Bible, let's make sure that our hope is a living hope



"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew xi, 28)

It remains one of the most remarkable invitations ever offered. Not "Come to me when you've got your life together" or "Come to me when you're strong". He says, "Come when you're weary."

In a culture that rewards performance, there is something wonderfully refreshing about that. Exhaustion is not a disqualification.

Christianity is often associated with rules, yet when you read the Gospels, what strikes you is how often Jesus speaks about trust, forgiveness, hope, peace and love. Not the absence of trouble. Peace amid trouble. There is a difference. Anyone can feel calm when the sea is still. The challenge is finding peace when the waves are breaking over the side of the boat. Jesus seemed to believe that was possible.

Many of us carry concerns about our health, worries about our children, questions about the future, regrets about the past. A burden we scarcely notice until we stop and wonder why we are so tired.

We check our phones. Refresh our screens. Scan the headlines. Rehearse tomorrow's problems. Search for reassurance. Yet reassurance has a remarkably short shelf life. No sooner is one worry settled than another arrives to take its place.

The modern world has given us access to more information than any previous generation. What it has not given us is peace. Knowledge can tell us what is happening. It cannot always tell us what to do with our fears.

Jesus pointed people towards something that sounds almost revolutionary today: trust. Not optimism. Not wishful thinking - Trust.

One of the great illusions of modern life is the belief that peace comes when everything is under control. But when was everything ever under control?

The opposite of anxiety is not certainty. It is trust.

That insight may be one reason Jesus continues to attract attention 20 centuries later. He did not promise us a life without storms. He promised we would not face them alone. Whether religious or not, there is something deeply attractive about that idea: our lives matter. We are not alone. We do not have to carry the weight of the world on our own shoulders.

For a tired and anxious world, perhaps Jesus would not begin with a demand, a doctrine or a debate. Perhaps he would begin with an invitation.

"Come to me."

Two thousand years later, it remains one of the most radical, relevant and refreshing sentences ever spoken.

The Rev Canon J John is a minister, speaker and author

Submitted by Philip Nye. This article first appeared in The Times and is reproduced with permission from The Times and from Canon John himself.

The Auction - A short story by David Reed

The auction was going well. There were bidders from all over the Milky Way Galaxy as well as some from further afield. There was one from the Spiral Galaxy, the auctioneer noticed, as well as a couple from Andromeda. There were also a few faces he did not recognise.

The bidding had started slowly, as it often does. Planet Mercury had gone to a bidder from Proxima Centauri for one million Universals. Not a bad price, considering its unhealthy location so close to Sol. No great interest was shown in the planet Mars, which had little offer. With hardly any atmosphere and consisting of rocks lacking in minerals and with no water, it was not profitable for mining nor as a tourist destination. But nevertheless it sold for half a million Universals to a bidder from Sirius.

Venus, however, attracted considerable interest. With an atmosphere consisting of numerous chemicals such as sulphuric acid and methane and with boiling rocks of lava, it was bound to fetch a good price. In the end it went for three million Universals.

'We now come to the most interesting lot of the day,' said The Auctioneer. 'Planet Earth, the third planet from Sol. A magnificent item, this. A masterpiece of creation, if I may say so. You can see some pictures of it on your viewing screens. What am I bid for this lot? Shall we start at two million Universals? Thank you Madam. Three? Anyone for three? Yes, Sir, in the second row. But surely it's worth more than that. Four, anyone? Am I bid four?'

'Four hundred million,' cried a voice from the back of the auditorium.

Gasps and cries filled the room. People turned their heads to see the bidder. The Auctioneer looked shocked. 'Are you serious, Sir?' he said. 'Did you really bid four hundred million?'

'Absolutely; four hundred million,' replied the stranger.

'Who are you, Sir?' asked The Auctioneer. 'May I have your name, since you don't have a bidding card.' 'Lux,' was the reply.

'Lex? Lex Luther of Gotham City? Batman's foe?'

'No Sir, LUX. Lux Lucifer.'

More gasps and cries filled the room.

'Is that your full name, Sir?' asked The Auctioneer. 'I need your full name and address.'

'My name is Lux Lucifarious Metastopheles Beelzebub,' came the reply. 'My address is The Pit, Sulphur Street, Hades, The Underworld.'

Shouts and cries filled the room.

'May I enquire, Sir,' said The Auctioneer – 'I know this is very unusual – but I would like to know – What do you intend to do with it?'

'Demolition, Sir. Total demolition and destruction,' was the reply.

Pandemonium filled the room. People stood up and shook their fists. One person hurled his catalogue at the bidder.

'Why, Sir?' asked The Auctioneer. 'Can I ask you to explain yourself. That would be a most unusual course of action.'

'Revenge,' said Lucifer. 'Revenge on the so-called Almighty Creator God, as he likes to be known. I'll show him who's almighty. Thinks he's Lord of the Universe, he does. 'Immortal Invisible God only wise,' he likes to be called. Light of the World. But I'll show him. I, Lucifer, Prince of Darkness – I'll show him.'

He was quite carried away by his ranting and raving. The room was in an uproar. It was a long time before The Auctioneer restored order. At last silence fell.

Then another voice spoke. A quiet voice but full of authority.

'I will bid higher.' It said.

'What? Higher than four hundred million Universals? Who are you, Sir?'

'I AM' said the voice.

'Yes, but WHO?' said The Auctioneer. 'It's no good saying 'I AM'.'

'I AM,' repeated the voice. 'I am the Lord of the universe. I am the Lord God Almighty your bidder was mocking just now. I am the 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise' your bidder referred to. But I am willing to give up immortality and invisibility to save the world. I will take on human flesh and become MAN. I will give my own life in exchange for Planet Earth. I will die to save the world.'



Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."