

## ***The Christian Life***

### ***Hope***

Lesson #3 for April 18, 2009

Scriptures: Luke 21:25,26; John 5:24; Romans 8:24,25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26,50-55; Revelation 21.

1. This lesson is about the hope that Christians have for something “beyond” this life. But, should it include hope for this life as well? When Paul said that we are saved “by hope” or “in hope,” what did he have in mind? (Romans 8:24,25) Martin Luther did not like the idea that Paul would say that we are saved “by hope.” He believed in salvation “by faith alone”! (Romans 1:17) Therefore, he translated Romans 8:24 as, “We are saved by faith, albeit in an attitude of hope.” Will all hope disappear when we get to heaven.
2. About a century ago, the American people were filled with a great deal of hope. Major new inventions were coming out almost daily. New ideas were being promoted. Healthcare was improving rapidly. Vitamins were being discovered! It almost seemed like man’s efforts would result in ultimate perfection. New forms of communication and travel were being tried. What is the status a century later? After two world wars, the Holocaust, hundreds of smaller wars, and a massive buildup of arms during the cold war, we are now wondering if it is possible that man could destroy himself from off this planet. Hope is giving way to despair and fear. We seem to be destroying the environment and using up some of the last cheap resources available to mankind. Adapted from *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for April 11, 2009.
3. How has the attitude of Americans changed since “9/11”? Do you think your personal outlook and the outlook for your family has improved or worsened since then?
4. Are there any things, people, or ideas embodied in this earth that really give you hope? Does it give you hope to know that Christ has already won the great controversy?
5. What “hopes” do you think the average person has—a person living in our world today? Are those hopes different if he/she lives in an advanced, educated, modern society versus the more traditional rural society? Things do not change very fast in rural societies.
6. What would you say to a close friend who was a non-Christian if he specifically asked you what you look forward to—what you hope for? How can we make the hope of Christians real to our non-Christian or nominally Christian friends? Maybe the greatest thing to hope for is that sin is going to be extinct soon!

Dr. Richard Nies used to tell the story about when he was taking his psychology degree at UCLA. He was painfully aware that psychologists, in general, do not look favorably on religion. Finally, some of his classmates discovered that he was a Christian, and one of them immediately began to harass him about the foolishness of being a Christian. Dr. Nies tried his best to avoid that classmate, but one day he came up the stairs and there above him coming down was that student. And the immediate attack was launched. So Dr. Nies said, “Okay. Let’s just suppose that there is a 50-50 chance that you are right and there is nothing at all

beyond this life, but there is also a 50-50 chance that I am right and there is a heaven to gain. If you are right, eventually we will both die and be dead for a long time. If I am right, then you will die and be dead for a long time but I will rise and go to heaven to live forever." As you can imagine, the classmate immediately responded, "But think of all the fun things that you are missing out on right now!" Whereupon, Dr. Nies responded, "I have lived among a lot of different people in L.A. and I know about the other side of life. I would not choose to live any differently than I am living now even if there were no heaven!" The classmate was speechless and never had anything more to say to Dr. Nies after that!

But, what should we say to someone who says, "I think all religions have their good points"? Can we show that Christianity and Adventism are really superior? (1 Peter 3:15)

7. We are familiar with the predictions made in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. This is one of the reasons we call ourselves "Adventists." Great signs in the sun, moon, and stars have passed into history. Many Christians have the idea that things on this earth will gradually improve, and eventually Jesus will return and reign from Jerusalem for a certain period of time, and then the events of the "second coming" will take place. Others, like us, believe that things will only get worse until finally, the earth will be shaken up by the plagues, and then Jesus will come. This view is sometimes referred to as the apocalyptic view.

Transgression has almost reached its limit. Confusion fills the world, and a great terror is soon to come upon human beings. The end is very near. [compare 1 John 2:18] God's people should be preparing for what is to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, page 555.2

Should Christians just sit back and say, "We knew all this was coming? God has all this worked out in advance." Or, is God waiting for us? (2 Peter 3:12) "The object of our mission is the same as the object of Christ's mission." {*RH*, June 16, 1904 par. 2}

8. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that things are going to get much worse before they get better. Does that mean we should be excited about the deterioration of the condition of this world? Should we be working to try to improve the political and environmental conditions while we recognize that, in fact, conditions are only going to get worse? Suppose theoretically that we believe that the melting of the ice caps will result in the flooding of many of the major cities of the world and that the results will lead to at least one of the final plagues. If we believe that is true, should we be working against "global warming"? Or should we be trying to hasten the melting? Could a true child of God just sit back and say, "Let the rest of the world go to hell," literally? Is that what Jesus did? Ellen White wrote, "Christ spent more time in healing than in teaching." {*RH*, September 10, 1908 par. 4} We must meet people where they are.

Shouldn't physicians have as their goal to produce the maximum number of "healthy, happy, holy" years for their patients? Would it be better to add 30 years of life to one patient than to add one year to each of 25 patients? (The total number of years would be more.) If that is correct, then leading one person to Christ with the result of that person living forever would be more important than helping hundreds or even thousands of other people to live longer lives

here! Should that be the major focus of the physician's work?

Jesus said in Matthew 24:37, "The coming of the Son of Man will be like what happened in the time of Noah." In the case of Noah, it appears that God had to act quickly because the way things were going there would soon have been no one at all listening to God! God had to destroy "all" of the wicked people to prevent them from dragging down the last family in the world who were paying any attention to Him! Could we reach a place where the number of God's true children is actually decreasing so that He finds it necessary to come? Was that what God was afraid of when He took the children of Israel into the land of Canaan? He told them to rid the country entirely of all the wicked fertility-cult worshipping Canaanites lest they be drawn into that kind of degrading practice themselves. Unfortunately, since they did not do as God suggested, we know what the result was! Sin is the cause of our problems. Does the world know that? It has now been documented by film footage that has recently been released after 50 some years of being locked up, that the people living around Dachau (near Munich, Germany) refused to believe that there could have been a concentration camp in their community! Along with the museum and remnants of that concentration camp, a memorial at that camp says, "Never Again." But some of Stalin's treachery came after that, so did Biafra, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur, etc. Will this earth remain as a "memorial" to prevent sin from ever happening again.

9. As Adventists, should we be making long lists of things which point to the soon coming of Jesus? Do those signs give us hope?
10. Should Christians primarily be a "pie in the sky" people? If we can grit our teeth and get through the rough times now, should we be happy that things are deteriorating rapidly?
11. If you were asked to make a list of the four or five most important "hopes" that you have, what would it include? Is the only good news for Christians the knowledge about what will happen after the second coming? What about Mark 10:29,30 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-19? We may lose members of our biological family who reject us because we become Christians, but we become a part of a much larger "family" around the world. Those who have traveled a lot know that in just about any place one can imagine, he/she will find Adventists if he/she looks carefully.
12. Read John 5:24. How has it impacted your life to know that you have "passed from life to death"? Read John 10:10. Do you believe that you are living the "more abundant life"? Is that primarily physical life or possibly spiritual blessings? Are there any limits to that promise from Jesus? Can we really experience eternal life here and now? (John 17:3) Have we as individuals experienced it? There are a couple of very important things to understand about the life which Jesus has promised: 1) Jesus is the hope and source of not only our life here but also eternal life (John 11:25,26; 14:6; 6:25-59; 1 John 5:11,12); 2) That hope depends on a faith relationship with Jesus Christ.
13. **Is your life demonstrably better because you are a Christian? Because you are a Seventh-day Adventist? Because you are a member of the University Church? Because you attend this Sabbath School class?**

14. Recall the story of the disciples right after the crucifixion and throughout that weekend. Their lives were full of fear and despair. They expected at any moment to be following Jesus in His crucifixion. They were scared to death. They were hiding inside of a locked room. But, by Sunday evening after the testimony of the women (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:9-11), the testimony of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:8-35), and finally, Christ Himself appearing personally to them in the upper room (Luke 24:36-44), they began to develop new hope. Peter, who had denied his Lord three times, quaking when a servant woman pointed her finger at him, was completely transformed (Mark 14:66-72). After Pentecost Peter and John stood in front of the entire Sanhedrin and said, "You are the ones who crucified the Messiah!" (Acts 4:8-13) What happens to people who have really developed a working relationship with Jesus? Is this the result of receiving the Holy Spirit? All their fears seemed to have vanished! They had incredible hope! What was the basis of that hope? What was it that changed their attitude over that weekend? What can we and what should we learn from their experience?
15. Atheism and evolution seem to be the new belief systems which are overtaking our world. Think about what kind of hope those systems offer us! Why are those systems so attractive to educated people in our world today? However, why is it that 40% of the most highly educated people in the world—even scientists—continue to believe in Christianity? And God? As we said last week, when facing evolutionists or atheists, we need to remember to compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges. If they want to talk about science, then we can compare our science with their science. If they want to talk religion, we will win every time. But, we must never let them suggest that it is their science against our religion.
16. As we all are aware, the economic conditions in our world right now do not seem to offer a lot of hope. Are Christians being foolish to hope for life beyond the first death? Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 50-55; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Does it help you to overlook the minor setbacks in this life to know that there is a grand and glorious hope beyond the grave?
17. Try to describe in as much detail as you can what you think will happen at the resurrection of the righteous. How will our bodies change? How will our senses change? What will we be able to see and hear that we could not see or hear before? We know that we will be able to see God and angels. If we will receive new bodies, will we actually be able to recognize our old friends? What will be different? What will be the same? Will we look the same? Do you hope that you will be able to use all of your brain instead of being limited to the 10% or 15% that the experts tell us we are now using? Do you look forward to living forever? Whatever we have lost (some have lost limbs or sight or hearing) will be restored. Adam was more than twice as tall as men now living. What size was his brain? Eve probably weighed 1200 lbs! Ladies, how would you like that?
18. What are the most compelling reasons for believing in a future resurrection? Miracles and statements in Scripture? Are you certain that because Jesus rose from the dead, you will be able to do so also? How many people will actually rise from the dead? (John 5:28,29)
19. Is God still in control of events on planet Earth? Is that what gives you hope? Do you look forward to the second coming with fear or excitement? With despair or hope? Why does Paul describe those who are not Christians as "without hope"? (Ephesians 2:12)

Most people in the ancient world believed in some god or gods. They had a religion. But it was a religion in which hope for the future, or even a better present, did not exist. Theirs was literally a faith without hope. The traditional Greek view was that the shades, or spirits, of the dead resided in Hades—not hell exactly, but a dark, dreary, unpleasant place—until they just faded out. Philosophers and others rejected this belief or considered alternatives. Plato and Pythagoras, for example, believed in the immortality of the soul. They hinted at reincarnation, or survival, in another realm, even though no one could be certain of its existence.—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 35.

Don't we believe that Enoch, Moses, and Elijah are already there? Does that increase your hope?

20. What do you think about the possibility of living forever? Would you like to live forever here on this earth as it is under the present conditions? Would you like to live forever with God in heaven? What do you look forward to the most? How much do we know about heaven? No doubt, God will have new and exiting things for us to do every day. (Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-10; 65:17-25; 66:22-24; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 15:42,43,52; Revelation 21; 22) Why doesn't God tell us more about heaven? Is heaven impossible to describe in human language? Wouldn't that give us more hope?
21. Read Revelation 22:7,10-12,20. Three times Jesus repeated the words, "I am coming soon." What do you think He had in mind when He said "soon"? (2 Peter 3:8,9)
22. Most of us spend a large percentage of our time earning money and doing activities for "this life." Should we be spending more time in preparation for the "next life"? Does God intend that we spend six full days each week working for this life?
23. Those who believe in the "Larger View" should have the greatest hope of all! If we have come to understand God as He really is, we should have no hesitation in looking forward to living with Him forever. And the better we get to know Him, the better our relationship with Him can be. Christians have hopes that are "out of this world"!

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Last modified: March 14, 2009

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