



September 12

THE NEW SHOFAR

*Our Hope is in the name of the Lord who made heaven
and earth – nothing else can be relied upon*

See, the Lord Yahweh is my help; who will prove me wrong?

I was doing my normal read of the morning papers the other day, and out of interest I counted up the number of times the word *hope* was used by the journalists. They were talking about COVID and the threats it was posing to our communities and stressing the importance of obeying the rules they were imposing. The word *hope* was used fourteen times across those different articles. Made me wonder if they did indeed mean *hope* as we know the word from the Bible.

What they were in fact saying was “trust us and all will be well. Place your hopes in us and your lives will be returned to normal. Of course they were offering something they could never guarantee. It was all about wishing. What they meant was by a lotto ticket in the COVID game and you might win liberation.

Biblical hope is nothing like that. Hope is to be found only in God. Hope is something coming from the very heart of God and as such there is the guarantee of the divine righteousness behind it. This is what Isaiah is proclaiming. In the face of the most challenging of human circumstances, the prophet was able to give them a firm assurance – place your hope in God for nothing can destroy what God has put into place for us. Our hopes are not to be found just in the words of God but in God Himself. That is why it is called the rock on which tomorrow can be built.

I was brought low, and he saved me.

Note the way the psalmist talks of these things. He acknowledges his life has fallen into a period of darkness, of depression, anxiety and who knows what other forms of physical and mental suffering. He is not turning to God and asking “why are these things happening to me your faithful servant. What he does is turn to God and proclaim the most wonderful of messages – God has saved me!

Note the way he is still in the same mess and that God has not sent him an army of angels to free him from whatever it was that assailed him. But there, as he is enduring being *brought low* he is at the same time rejoicing that God has saved him. He is yet to be free from his suffering but he knows with an absolute certainty, God’s salvation/healing is already his. He has much to do if he is to rejoice in that healing and take it into his circumstances, but note how it is divine hope that is his rallying point. He knows salvation is there for him – in the midst of his woes. That is hope.

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Hope is not a wish. Hope is a guaranteed certainty, a divine reality

There was no guarantees to be found in the hope of which the papers spoke. That hope was placed in humans who were running their own agendas. Hope in a human person or human institution or human philosophy is always doomed. Human hope is little more than an empty wish – I hope/wish I can win Tattsлото this week. Anyone who builds their lives on that kind of hope/wish is doomed to disappointment. Every hope in anything, or anyone other than God will fail.

Christian hope is about a guaranteed certainty because hope is directed towards God. We know from history how God is reliable, that God can be trusted. The God who loves us will never disappoint or leave us without the graces we seek and need. Through our faith, hope is real. It is tangible, a power, a force brought into our lives through divine action.

This is why the prophet Isaiah was so absolutely confident. He knew the promises of God never went unfulfilled, that the word of God was never returned empty. Those who placed their trust in God always found satisfaction, were enriched by an experience of the loving presence of God and were infused with the peace that comes with knowing God was already at work as I struggled onwards through my darkness.

How do we access that wonderful divine gift of Hope?

Hope is a free gift from God and it is discovered through our proximity to God. Anyone living in God knows what hope is and it is Jesus who sets down some of the fundamental steps we need to be taking if we are to be enlivened by hope. That hope is not something we find but it is the light filling our lives when we obey the Lord Jesus command: *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.* While we continue to focus on what is causing our anxiety, fear and pain we cannot find hope for a way out of it. However, when we make the following of Christ our priority; when we stop trying to fight things on our own and deny ourselves turn from the empty promises of others, we follow Christ.

Yes, taking up our cross (another way of saying taking up our baptismal vocations) and living in the footsteps of Jesus is the way we experience divine hope. Jesus himself illustrated that for us when he meekly went to the cross believing – thus hoping – the cross was not his end. He knew God had something for Him in his dying things others could never imagine. But He left it to God and not in his followers to save Him. He did not hope for a last minute reprieve from Pilate. He knew the Father already had the answer under way and went to Golgotha in hope. And then, on the third day he rose from the dead. That is where Christian hope is leading us. The guarantee that hope built on faith will never disappoint us.

God is the hope for which we yearn and it is our in the midst of all that comes our way if and when we release control of life to the Father by living as one in Christs.

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