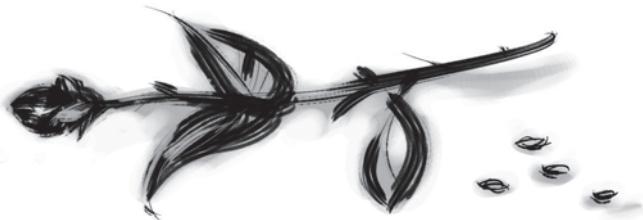


Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 21:25, 26; John 5:24; 1 Cor. 15:20–26; 50–55; Revelation 21.*

Memory Text: “Always be prepared to give the answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have” (*1 Peter 3:15, NIV*).

The twentieth century began in a mood of great optimism. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment Era, optimism had dominated the way of thinking in the Western world. As human beings, we could not only discover all truth using reason, we also were capable of moral perfection. New inventions, new modes of travel, the dramatic increase of medical knowledge, the introduction of new machines, and the steady advancement of human morals would improve all lives. But after two world wars, the holocaust, the nuclear threat of the cold war, and worldwide terrorism as an ever-present danger, coupled with the realization that humankind is in the process of destroying the environment it needs for human survival, little reason for optimism remains.

However, there is hope, not in what we see or in what we can do but in what God has promised us through Jesus, His Son.

The Week at a Glance: As followers of Christ we can have hope even amid a world that in and of itself offers none. And that's because this hope is not based on ourselves or on anything we or the world can offer. This hope is based solely on Jesus and His promises to us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 18.*

Hope Amid Our World

Life after September 11, 2001, has greatly changed. People will always remember the images of passenger airliners flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. We all realize that it can happen again. There is no way we can be fully protected from people who are prepared to die as they use an airplane, filled with men, women, and children, as a flying bomb or are willing to blow themselves up at a bus stop or in a supermarket. There is fear everywhere, and considering the world we live in, that fear is understandable.

What did Jesus single out as one of the characteristics of the time of the end? *Luke 21:25, 26.*

“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. God’s people should be preparing for what is to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 555. Imagine what she would say were she alive in our post-9/11 environment!

Ours is a world of war, corruption, greed, and terror. And we know that many unpleasant things yet will occur in the future—in the world, and even in the church. But whatever happens, we have hope through Jesus. There may be anguish among the nations. People may even faint from terror—“apprehensive of what is coming on the world” (*Luke 21:26, NIV*)—but this will not be the case for those who have been expecting their Lord. None of these horrible things should take us by surprise. After all, the Bible has warned us all through its pages that we should expect toil, suffering, and trouble until Jesus returns. The fact that we see these things should only help confirm for us the truth of God’s Word.

Read *Luke 21:28*. What hope is Jesus offering us amid all the turmoil and fear of the world?

Why is it so fruitless, and empty, to place our hope in this world or in what this world offers? Why do we tend to do that, even though it should be obvious by now that if we are to have any hope, it must be a hope that transcends whatever this world can give?

Hope—Here and Now

The Christian hope has to do with the future: Christ’s return; the resurrection of God’s people; a new heaven and a new earth; eternity with God. But salvation is also a present reality. That kind of hope separates us from those without the certainty that life has meaning and that in Christ humanity has an eternal future. The apostle Paul reminds us of the radical change that takes place when we accept Jesus as our Lord. As long as we are separated from Christ, we are “without hope and without God in the world” (*Eph. 2:12, NIV*). But all this changes when we are no longer “far away” from God but have been “brought near through the blood of Christ” (*vs. 13, NIV*).

In what terms did Jesus describe the radical change that takes place when we “hear” His Word and believe in Him? *John 5:24.*

What kind of life can be ours? *John 10:10.* What does this mean, and how should we be experiencing this promise?

“Life” is one of the key words of the Gospel of John. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the concept of life is primarily eternal life. “But in the Gospel of John, life is particularly focused on the present reality of what Jesus does for those who believe in Him. . . .

“There are two keys to attaining life at its best. The first is to know that the source of that life is found only in Christ (John 14:6; 6:33–58; 1 John 5:11, 12). Wherever Jesus is, life is (John 11:25, 26). The second key to attaining life is believing (1:4, 12). It is through continuous relationship with Jesus that individuals appropriate the life that is ever present in Jesus (3:16, 36).”—Jon Paulien, *John, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), p. 189.

How has Jesus changed your life for the better here and now? What do you have now that you didn’t have before coming to know Jesus and the hope He gives us?

Hope Beyond the Grave

Death comes to all of us (unless we are alive at the moment of Christ's return). All of us have lost loved ones in death. We are daily confronted with the grim reality of death. We see it as we pass cemeteries, see hearses, or switch on the television news. But even worse, we face it up close as we say our final goodbye to a friend or relative. Death is our archenemy, but it is one that will be defeated.

What is the glorious truth about the reality of death? *1 Cor. 15:20–26, 50–55, 1 Pet. 1:3.*

How does the certainty of the resurrection divide humanity? *1 Thess. 4:14.*

The apostle Paul, in his famous chapter about the resurrection (*1 Corinthians 15*), stresses that the hope of the resurrection is an essential component of our total faith experience (*vss. 12–19*). If there is no resurrection, our faith is empty.

Of course, there are many aspects of the physical resurrection that we do not understand. But of one thing we can be sure: Our “resurrection” does not depend on the safekeeping of the present material substances of our bodies. It depends on the power of our Creator to safeguard our identity and to re-create us at a given moment with a new (perfect) body that will never need any cosmetic surgery or antiaging pills.

We have no idea how God is going to perform this miracle. But the God who could create life here to begin with certainly has the power to re-create the earth and fill it with the people whose identities have been safeguarded in the divine memory. Our hope is not based on anything we can verify with our intellect or our senses. The resurrection involves a realm of existence far beyond anywhere science can take us. But it is based on the fact that Christ has conquered death. As a result, the death of the believer is but a temporary “sleep” from which he or she will be raised and given eternal life.

Even with this great hope, the greatest any of us could have, we still hate death, we still fear it, and we still flee from it. This is only natural (for death is unnatural). At the same time, what can we do to nourish and strengthen our confidence in the great promise that we have regarding eternal life, a promise that alone can lessen our fear of death now?

Eternal Hope

How can finite beings ever understand what it is to be infinite? How can we, as mortals—most of whom will not live beyond 80 or 90 years—ever understand what it is to be immortal and live forever? Eternal life is not simply a continuation of our present life. That would in many ways more resemble “hell” than “heaven.” Eternal life has an altogether different quality. While we are still in our present mortal state, we will have to be content with a glimpse of what the future holds: We see but “a poor reflection” and “know [only] in part” (*1 Cor. 13:12, NIV*).

In what ways will eternal life differ from our present existence? *1 Cor. 15:42, 43, 52; Revelation 21*. What things will be similar?

We are left with lots of questions as we contemplate the life that awaits us, questions that will never be fully answered here and now. But we can learn from Jesus’ own resurrection. It is important to note that the Christ who was raised from the dead was the same Person as the One who a few days earlier died on the cross. He arose with a “glorified” body that was no longer subject to the laws of nature in the way our present mortal bodies are. Yet at the same time, He possessed a continuity with the “human form” that He had prior to His death and resurrection. He was the same Person, recognizable by His outward appearance, His voice, and His gestures. That gives us good reason to conclude that in our new “glorious bodies” we will be recognized by those we knew in this life and who will enjoy the life in the beyond with us.

And yet, we can also experience some of that eternal life now. Paul explains to us (*Rom. 8:10*) that the Spirit will enter the person who has turned to Christ. The believer, therefore, is already touched by the eternal life that will become a full reality in the world to come. The presence of the Spirit is the pledge of our eternal salvation (*Eph. 1:13, 14*).

Try to imagine what life will be like in a new heaven, a new earth, with new bodies. Let your imagination soar; write out a paragraph based on what we find in the Bible, about what this new life will be like. How foolish to throw it all away for anything that this life offers us.

Christ Our Hope

Long before Christ entered this world, His coming had been predicted. True to those promises, He did indeed come. Manifold are the promises that He will come a second time. He said so Himself: “I will come back!” On the final page of the Bible this promise is repeated: “Yes, I am coming soon” (*Rev. 22:20, NIV*). This is the corporate hope of Christian believers. It is “the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (*Titus 2:13, NIV*).

In what sense does the hope of the Christian culminate in the second coming of Jesus? (*Rev. 22:7, 10–12, 20*). Why are these promises so crucial to us?

How does the time aspect mentioned in 2 Peter 3:8, 9 impact our understanding of the term *soon* in connection with the Second Coming?

The ultimate solution for the sin problem and all the misery sin has caused is not found in anything humanity can invent or arrange but in the intervention of heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is not in human technology, clever politicians, or social and moral progress. These things never can solve the problem of death. And although it is important to know what will precede and accompany the coming of the Lord, it is even more important that we are sure of the One we expect.

Our Lord will come soon. “It is just a matter of time, that’s all. And no one can change this fact. No tyrant can reach up and grab the world from His grasp. It remains firmly and forever in the hands of the Crucified One. None can undo Calvary anymore than they can undo their birth. . . . Since the cross, we live in time filled by the victory of Calvary—time determined by that goal. Hence, whether they know it or not, humanity does not merely advance toward a hoped-for goal in some distant day, with the possibility that it may never come. No! Humanity moves triumphantly from a goal Jesus has already reached.”—Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 540.

A philosopher named Martin Heidegger once said that “only a god can save us.” Whatever he himself might have meant by that idea, why is it so true? Where are you placing your hope? If it’s in anything but the true God, why is this hope a false one?

Further Study: Norman Gulley's book *Christ Is Coming* is probably the most complete Adventist book in recent times about last-day events and the second coming of Christ. You may want to scan the book and read a few chapters, in particular the chapter titled "The Greatest Rescue of All Time" (pp. 538–552). For the classic description of the moment when our hope will be fulfilled, see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (in particular, pp. 662–678).

Try to commit the following majestic words to memory: "The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, read your depictions of what you envision eternal life in a new earth will be like. Compare and discuss what was presented.
- 2 How do you respond to those who say that this hope Christians have of another existence causes them not to care deeply enough about the woes of this existence?
- 3 How can you remain hopeful, even when everything seems to go against you?
- 4 How do we experience, here and now, some of the hope that we have in Christ? How should lives differ now because of this hope? What can we do, in a real and visible way, to show others the immediate fruit and benefits of being a follower of the living God?

Summary: Hope is a vital component of the Christian life. It is firmly based on what Christ accomplished on the cross. The Christian's hope has to do with the here and now, for the kingdom that is to come is, in principle, already present in the believer. Yet, the full realization of the blessed hope is future. We know that the world is still affected by the results of Satan's rebellion, but the outcome is secure: Our Lord reigns, and His eternal kingdom will soon be realized in all its glory. Our hope is to be citizens of that kingdom forever.

Finding the Savior

Anna* was a new Adventist Christian when she met Ahmet* while working in Turkey. Since Sabbath was her day off, Ahmet arranged to have Sabbath off so they could spend time together. Although Ahmet was not a Christian, Anna sensed that he was searching for faith. In time the two were married.

After their son was born, Anna arranged to take him to Germany for vaccinations they could not get in Turkey. She was surprised when Ahmet said that he wanted to go with her, for she knew that he did not like Germany. He explained that he wanted to get away from his own family who were urging him to convert her to his family's traditional faith.

While in Germany, Ahmet met many Adventists and was impressed with how warm and friendly they were. He saw how different Christians are from other people. His interest in Christianity grew.

When the couple returned to Turkey, they joined a small group of believers who worship in a private home. (The Adventist Church in Turkey has fewer than a hundred members, most of whom are not ethnic Turks.) The pastor welcomed Ahmet and asked him to help translate Sabbath School lessons into Turkish. Ahmet agreed. Anna noticed that Ahmet often read her Bible and her religious books when he thought she was not watching.

As Ahmet translated the lessons, questions sometimes arose regarding the meaning of a Bible text or how to phrase a question. As Ahmet and Anna talked about such issues, Anna realized that Ahmet was thinking deeply about his relationship with Jesus. One question they discussed was, "What is Jesus to you?" Ahmet thought a moment then answered, "Jesus is my Savior." Anna praised God for this demonstration of faith in her seeking husband.

One night Ahmet couldn't sleep, so he went to the living room to read his Bible. That night he decided to be baptized. The next day he called the pastor and said, "If you have nothing better to do today, you will baptize me?" Later that day Anna and Ahmet went to the seashore, where Ahmet sealed his commitment to Christ in baptism.

The couple closes their bakery on Sabbaths, which prompts people to ask why. Carefully Anna shares her faith with a prayer that God will open their hearts. They also offer guided tours of biblical sites such as Ephesus. Even the bus drivers notice that Christians are different. They ask questions about what Christians believe, and this opens opportunities to share God's love with His other children.

Ahmet and Anna thank God that the world church supports missionaries in Turkey. Our mission offerings provide resources to help lead searching souls to Jesus in this great unreached land.

* Not their real names.