

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 an answer to everyone who asks you to give the 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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 3:15*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Though we live in a sin-scarred world, we have hope of eternal life in Jesus.

Feel: Assurance through fulfilled prophecy that God has a plan for our lives.

Do: Live a life full of hope, focusing on the promise of eternity, and inspire others to do the same.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Origin of Hope (*1 Cor. 15:12–19*)

A The basis of hope is in the resurrection of Jesus. What does Paul mean when he says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”? (*vs. 19*).

B The promise of eternal life gives us reason to hope. What other elements of Christianity give us hope in an otherwise hopeless world?

II. Affirming Hope (*Luke 21:25–28*)

A The gift of prophecy shows us that God has a plan for our lives, despite the seemingly endless madness of the world. From this gift we take hope. How has God shown you His wisdom and understanding through the prophetic gift?

B Our hope in eternal life is based in the future. In what ways does God mean for us to experience a real hope for our present lives now on earth?

III. Embodying Hope (*Ps. 31:24*)

Live your hope focused on the promise of eternity. Let your hope be seen in your attitude. How else can you make your hope shine in the way you live?

► **Summary:** The hope we have in Christ is an integral element of the Christian faith. Without it we are miserable. Let your hope truly affect your outlook on life.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The death and resurrection of Jesus give us as Christians reason to hope in a better life now and for eternity. This hope transcends present circumstances, because it is based not on probabilities but on certainties.

Just for Teachers: In this week’s lesson, we discuss and explore the role of hope in the Christian life.

Some time ago, the famous American humorist and poet Dorothy Parker was working on a movie script for producer Samuel Goldwyn, who requested that she give it a happy ending. Parker responded, “ ‘I know this will come as a shock to you, Mr. [Sam] Goldwyn, but in all history, which has held billions and billions of human beings, not a single one ever had a happy ending.’ ”
— http://www.workinghumor.com/quotes/dorothy_parker.shtml.

One need look no further than the evening news to confirm just how much truth Parker’s quip holds. The stock market falls. Friends or spouses leave. And in the long run, as one bumper sticker pessimistically reminds us, we’ll all be dead.

But as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we know that the world we see around us is not the only world we have to look forward to. In the real long run, we have the hope of eternal life.

Discuss With the Class: Arguably, anyone who wakes up every day has hope in something, whether he or she knows it or not. What are some of the things in which people place their hope other than God? Why are these replacements inadequate?

Consider This: Too often we may find ourselves turning to God as a last resort when all else fails. What can we do to make God our hope in all things instead of turning to Him as a last resort?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: We can take one of two possible attitudes toward the future: hope or fear. Emphasize that, as Christians, we have reason for hope in a world where fear often seems to be the dominant—and reasonable—attitude.

CONTINUED ►

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary**

Overview: Hope is a defining characteristic of people with faith. We have hope because our faith informs us that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, an infinitely good and powerful God is in control of the circumstances of our lives.

I. Hope and Fear (*Review with your class Luke 21:25, 26, 28.*)

According to Luke 21:26, the predominant reaction of people living on planet Earth in the end times will not be hope but fear. Given the list of natural disasters and strange happenings presented in the previous texts, this reaction can't be said to be unreasonable. If one doesn't know that such things are signs of something better to come, the signs appear to indicate that much worse things will come instead. It is only because of hope-inspiring faith that we can entertain the possibility of standing up and raising our heads because our redemption is drawing near (*vs. 28*).


Again, the skeptics of this world lay odds on the belief that there are no happy endings, that in the long run we're all going to end up dead. But as Christians, we know that we have a better offer for the future.

Consider This: Based on the verses above, why are the end times a cause for hope, not fear?

II. Faith Without Hope (*Review with your class Ephesians 2:12, 13.*)

Paul refers to his readers as being “without hope” (NIV) before they come to Christ. It is worth noting that these people were not atheists in the regular sense of the word. 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.

As for improvement of the state of the world at large, the golden age—

CONTINUED 

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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

as the poet Hesiod suggested—was in the past and most likely wasn't coming back.

Only the Jews and the Zoroastrians (the Magi of Luke 2 could have been Zoroastrians) foresaw a better world to come. And only the Christians could point to concrete evidence of such a future world in the form of Christ and His resurrection. (See *The Interpreter's Bible* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press], vol. 10, pp. 652, 653.)

Consider This: What can you do to reach people who are nominally “religious” but are without the hope that Christ provides us?

III. Eternity (*Review with your class 1 Corinthians 15:42, 43, 52; Revelation 21.*)

As far as we know, humankind is the only species that is aware of his or her own impending death, and no one ever likes it. We want eternity, even if we aren't quite sure what it is.

But if we really thought about it, few of us would want to continue to live infinitely long with our current imperfect and aging bodies, the tiresome natural laws of gravity and thermodynamics, and the boring and repulsive thoughts continually cycling their way through our befogged brains.

Fortunately, God has promised us a life not only everlasting but also qualitatively different from what we currently have. In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul contrasts our present physical body with the glorious spiritual body God has waiting for us. What is it like? We don't know. But whatever it is, we can be certain that it is worth hoping and waiting for.


Consider This: Whatever physical or mental challenges you may have, God offers you a fresh, clean start and the promise of a better life with Him, now and in the future. How does that assurance make you feel?

► STEP 3—Practice

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to use the following questions to think about the Christian hope as it relates to their own lives and to the world at large.

Thought Question:

A large part of the hope we have in Christ is the knowledge of the even-

CONTINUED 

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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

tual triumph over our enemy, death. What would we say to those who insist that death is an inescapable part of life and nature (evolutionists, for example) or that death is not real and that no one really dies (as maintained by most other spiritual or religious communities)?

Application Questions:

What is our role in making our present world better, given that our hope is in the next one? How should we work for peace, a cleaner environment, and so on? Or do such attempts show a lack of faith? Explain why you answer the way you do and discuss, as a class, the reasons for your differences.

► STEP 4—Apply

Just for Teachers: This week we have learned that God provides us with a sense of hope that enables us to face the struggles of each day, as well as anything the future might bring. The following activity is intended to get your students to articulate this hope in their own words and to bring it into their minds daily.

- Even though our world is in many ways a tragic and wounding place, God has left us with many examples of His loving presence. Have your students list the things in their lives or in the world at large that convince them that God is still in control and is still trying to communicate hope to those who look for it.
- There are at least two ways you can do the previous exercise with your class: (1) have each student list items on an individual sheet of paper or (2) use a “brainstorming” format in which the students mention the items out loud, and the instructor writes them on a chalkboard or similar media.

Consider This: What do your answers tell you about the importance of hope? How do your examples help renew your hope and trust in Jesus? How can you share this hope with others you encounter in the coming week?

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 unshad-owed 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.