

HOPELESS

"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Ephesians 2:12.

This verse contains an accurate description of the appalling condition of the Ephesians before they were saved. It is perhaps the darkest and saddest picture in the whole Bible. It describes the natural state of every sinner.

Four words describe the pitiful plight of the unsaved.

1. Helpless.

"Who were dead in trespasses and sins." They were physically alive but spiritually dead. Spiritual death is a state of separation from God and His life.

2. Hopeless.

"Having no hope." How miserable is any person who does not have any hope! How dark is the day when no ray of hope shines! It is hope that keeps a man smiling when death is clutching at him.

3. Homeless.

Without Christ any man is homeless. We are all pilgrims, but those of us who have Christ are not homeless.

4. Godless.

The unsaved are without God in a world which is teeming with evidences of His wisdom and power. Those who do not believe in God's Son are godless.

It is a fearful thing to think of anyone being without Christ, and, yet, that is the condition in which all of us were. All believers once were without Christ. No tongue can tell the depth of wretchedness that is contained in this expression. There is no poverty like it. There is no destitution that is comparable to it.

What does it mean to be without Christ? It means to be without life. To be without Christ means that there is no peace or rest. It means that there is no safety. During World War II a tanker was blasted by a submarine torpedo in the Pacific, and the little group of men made their way to the life boats, got in them and set sail, adrift on the sea thousands of miles away. They hoped against hope that perhaps some plane would come over, and they would be sighted. One of the men who wrote an account of the incident said, "I felt as I had never felt before; how small and infinitesimal a fragment of life I was, as I looked out on that broad expanse of water. There was nothing to be seen, north, east, south or west but water. Then there was the blue sky above; not a cloud in the sky, but the hot sun was beaming down upon us." On and on they floated. The days passed, and one by one the sailors died. They had to be let down overboard into the sea. Oh, what a tale of horror it was! At last the plane came. The survivors were rescued. How fortunate they were! But, to die without Christ means that no rescue will ever come. To be without Christ means that there is no hope.

I do not know of any words that are any more dreadful than these two, "No hope." We are familiar with hopelessness in life. We know what

happens in a sick room when hope goes out of a patient. So long as the patient remains hopeful the doctor has a mighty helpmeet in his ministry, but when the patient loses heart and hope the doctor strives in the face of almost assured defeat. The influence is similar in the ministry of the nurse. When the last chance is gone and there is no possibility of recovery and the nurse has to labor confronted by certain defeat, the service becomes a burdensome task.

A doctor stands beside a bed upon which lies a man who is very ill. With his finger on the patient's pulse, he looks intently into his eyes, eagerly watching every movement and the way in which the sick man breathes. The sick man's wife and children have gathered around the bed looking anxiously at the husband and father and then at the doctor. At last the doctor looks up and says, "No hope."

You had better be without anything else than without hope. You may be in great distress at present, but, if you have a sure hope for the future, it matters little. You may be enjoying great prosperity, but, if you do not have a good hope for the future, it is of little worth. It would be better to be the poorest person in the community now and have a good hope for the future than to be a multimillionaire and have no hope for the future.

What do we mean by hope? Desire, no matter how strong it may be, is not hope. Mere expectation, no matter how confident it may be, is not hope. We use the word "hope" very carelessly, but in the Word of God it is used with great care. Hope is a well-founded expectation for the future. Any expectation that does not have a sure foundation is not really hope.

I. Who Is Hopeless?

1. All who deny the existence of God.
"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." One may cherish fond wishes about the future, but, if he denies or doubts that a wise and loving God presides over his destiny and that of others, he cannot have any well-founded expectations for the future. Man's only rational foundation for hope in the future is the existence of an intelligent and omnipotent God ruling nature and the affairs of men.
2. All who discard the Bible.
If one rejects the Bible, he has no hope or expectation for the future that has a solid and certain foundation under it. If he discards the Bible, the future is dark.
3. All who reject Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
God's Word does not hold out any hope except to those who accept Christ. The one who says he believes the Word of God but rejects the Saviour whom the Bible presents has every vestige of hope swept away by that very Book. For the person who rejects the Christ, the future has in it nothing but the appalling blackness of utter despair.

II. In What Respect Are They Hopeless?

1. In the life that now is.
 - (1) They do not have any guarantee of continued prosperity.

They may be very prosperous today, have perfect health, a comfortable home, hosts of friends, and all that one might wish in this world, but, unless they are right with God because they have received Christ as their Saviour, they do not have any guarantee that these things will continue.

- (2) They do not have any guarantee of continued capacity to enjoy prosperity. No man out of Christ has any guarantee of continued capacity to enjoy the things of the life that now is.
- (3) They do not have any guarantee of continued life.
"There is but a step between me and death." Every step that each of us takes daily is but a march toward the grave. The sinner is without hope, and as he goes on in life his path grows darker. There isn't a day in the unsaved man's life but what he is in a worse condition spiritually and is more hopeless than he was the day before. His path grows darker as the days pass by. What a contrast this is to the child of God. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

Some years ago two men stood in the doorway of the library of the richest American of his day in New York City. The property of this man was valued at \$196,000,000. He was in conversation with a business friend, discussing how to make more millions. You would have said that this millionaire had bright hopes for the future. In that respect you would have been mistaken. He did not have any hope. Suddenly he pitched forward to the floor, and, when Mr. Garrett picked up Mr. William H. Vanderbilt from the floor, he was a corpse. The next day a man on the exchange asked, "How much did Vanderbilt leave?" The other man replied, "He left it all."

2. In the life that is to come.

This life is but a brief span at the longest. Ere long each of us will be in eternity, either in heaven or in hell. But, eternity is long and will never end. While it is a tragedy to live without Christ, it is an even greater tragedy to die Christless, for this means that he will be where Christ is not throughout all eternity. "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Ecclesiastes 11:3). So it is with the sinner. If he dies saved, he will be saved throughout eternity; and, if he dies unsaved, he will be unsaved throughout eternity. Our Lord declared that He would recognize and own those in eternity who in life had accepted Him. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

III. Believers In Christ Have Hope.

1. They have hope for the life that now is. They do not know what the future may bring, but they have the sure Word of God for it that it will not bring anything but good. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). They know that God will supply their needs. "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). They know that God will not withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly.

2. They have hope for the life that is to come. In the world to come they have "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for them (I Peter 1:4). They have the blessed assurance that they are the children of God, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. That is truly a wonderful hope.

Which do you prefer? Do you want to continue hopeless or to have this glorious hope? You have your choice. Which will you take? Don't reject Christ! Receive Him as your Saviour and confess Him before others now as we join in singing.