



Someone has said that a pessimist is an optimist with information, but that makes optimists ignorant and pessimists cynical. Wherever we live in this unpredictable 21st century there needs to be a beacon of hope. For the Christian, faith in Christ's resurrection and therefore hope in our resurrection is the reason we can stand firm in the Lord. Holding onto hope takes courage. 'The bravest thing I have is hope'. **Read Philippians 3: 12 to 4:1.**

1. Hope in our resurrection. Verses 12-16

- For the Christian, death is not the end of life. Life as we know it is both penultimate and imperfect.
 - The Hopeful Christian life is amazing: We have the 'surpassing greatness' of knowing Christ, **(v.8)** We have the power of the resurrection dwelling in us. **(v. 10 & also Ephesians 1: 18-20)** We have the gift of being enabled to live life to the full. **(John 10: 10)**
 - But the Hopeful Christian life is also difficult and challenging: We sign up to the 'fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings'. **(v. 10)** Paul talks of 'pressing onward and straining forward' towards the prize of becoming increasingly like our Lord Jesus Christ. **(vv.13-14)**. Christian Hope also involves patient waiting. **(Romans. 8:25)**
- Our resurrection is our ultimate end and our great Hope, but for some it is a profoundly difficult-to-accept Hope – that after death our bodies will live again in a new heaven and a new earth with Christ
 - The purpose of Christ's death and resurrection for us was not just to make our earthly life better, it was to make sure that through faith in Him we will also share His resurrection life, eternally.
 - The Holy Spirit doesn't only liberate us now, in this penultimate life – He is the guarantee of what is to come in heaven, our ultimate destination.

2. Standing firm in the Lord. We are to imitate Paul's pattern for life. Verses 17-4:1

- Christ suffered for our good and we will also find ourselves suffering for peoples' spiritual benefit.
 - Human imperfection is not caused by a load of mistakes: it's caused by moral corruption, by lack of integrity. It has to be confronted by Justice: humanity is to blame but cannot help itself.
 - On the cross, Jesus dealt with the consequences of sin so that we can receive mercy and grace. There are still many who are enemies of Christ's Cross: the standard is unreasonable, the punishment unjust, the Judge is unfair ... They make a nonsense of what Christ has done for them
 - Christ's sufferings were not pointless, they were for our spiritual benefit.
- Our life (though we groan!) is also for others' spiritual benefit but the wonder is that we benefit from the small sacrifices we make and find ourselves growing nearer to God. **(Romans 5: 1-5)**

3. Embrace Hope! Verses 20-21

- Our citizenship is in heaven. We're only here for a short while, the New Jerusalem stands for ever.
- Jesus is returning, we eagerly await our transformed bodies. There is real Hope for a future with Him
- Be courageous – 'The bravest thing I have is Hope'.

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Questions for Discussion:

1. **In what way is the hopeful Christian life amazing for you?**
2. **In what way is the hopeful Christian life difficult or challenging for you?**
3. **Do we find it easy or difficult to believe in the promise of a bodily resurrection?**
4. **How do we imagine eternal life?**
5. **Can we describe any 'God-moments' experienced when we felt particularly close to God or to heaven?**
6. **Do we live in Hope?**