

A FUTURE SURE AS GOD

A series of four studies on the matter of covenant. Other titles are:
God's covenant, the inner dynamic of creation
Blood enough for the peace of the world
The one love that endures

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Everyone must find a future to guide their present living. We were born with a mission to complete and must spend our life moving toward that goal. What hopes do we cherish? What future do we believe in? What would make both us and our world complete, content and deeply joyful?

Some may have given little conscious thought to this—though it probably simmers beneath the surface in everyone. Some project their goals clearly. But everyone needs to have a future look. The dreamers, the utopians, the people who are never satisfied may not be stupid. Perhaps they protest about the rest of us who, too quickly, have ceased to 'Have glimpses that would make [us] less forlorn'.

But, on what can our hopes be based? Can cleverness guarantee its projections? Can we avert all disasters? Or, for the more casual, will fate prove to be friendly? Will luck be on our side?

And what of virtue? Can we rely on that? The world says we all ought to do the 'right thing'—whatever that may be. Our contracts put this in writing and make it public. We love to maintain and even proclaim our honour. Doubtless, our legal infrastructure has served us well, but if we think we proclaim our own virtue by it, we are fools. It is obvious that we do not do what we ought to do.

In many places, it appears that hope is in short supply. Virtue has been stretched too thin and snapped. Luck has run out and fate shows its leering face.

What we need to hear shouted from the housetops and to celebrate in our streets is that God has not made a contract with us—based on our doing the 'right thing'. He has proclaimed his covenant to us—based on his own goodness, and it proclaims a future determined and secured by God himself.

Can a human being know what the world is about? Can a person know where their life is from and where it is going? There are many things that we cannot know, but the things we need to know have been revealed to us by God and through his covenant with the creation.

God's covenant is a plan

From the beginning, God has purposed to unite everything in his Son, to reconcile all things to himself, to abolish injustice, pain and tears, to make an end of all disaster. Everyone will know God from the greatest to the least. He has determined that this be so. There is a future for the race and the whole creation. This is our hope.

This plan of God embraces all of the past. Many plans made by ourselves are built on a denial of the past, a reaction to it, a running from its consequences. God's plan is not built on anything but his own purpose, but it includes the past. Our history has included many things on which we would prefer not to build the future, but, mysteriously, God would not have anything different from what it has been.

The past of our race has included crucifying Jesus—and that is the centre of God's plan. All our sins focus in this that we reject the Christ. But by the power of his love, he has turned this foolishness into salvation. By the blood of Christ, we are forgiven for every sin and washed of all impurity. Our past may then be recalled with gratefulness. We move forward as whole persons with an understanding of why we are where we are.

The plan of God includes the present. We are not crusaders who have no time for anything but carving out a future for ourselves. Today is God's too, an important part of the future to be relished as it passes. And if the present is full of trouble and pain, then it is also true that underneath us are God's everlasting arms. This is the trust of those who walk in covenant relation with God. They may not always feel the presence of God or be able to prove his graciousness, but, the faithful witness of God's Son in history and the witness of the Holy Spirit within bring love and joy and peace into the present.

Our hope is larger than what can be seen

The plan of God includes the future. This is a mystery to us because, like God, it is unseen. But, as the Apostle Paul says: 'we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.'

Those whose life does not flow from God, who have no hope in God, must make of the things that are seen—its tasks and pleasures, its relationships and resources—more than they actually are, and these things crumble under the weight of importance we try to give to them.

In particular, everything needs a future—time to grow. This life is too short to accommodate what God has poured into a human being. We are too circumscribed in a world which has been given up to futility. What God is about, and what he is about in us requires a larger frame of reference.

Abraham greeted what was promised to him 'from afar'. He died not having received what was promised but he 'received' the promise nonetheless. And it changed his life and made him a blessing in the earth.

Israel felt the limits of God's blessing in their national life—because of their unfaithfulness—but increasingly saw that their future would be secured by a Messiah. He would establish both righteousness and peace in the earth.

Old Simeon, who held the infant Jesus in his arms, said: 'my eyes have seen your salvation'. He was content to die without seeing more because of the promise that attached to that child.

Jesus told his disciples: 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'.

He also said: 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.'

The apostles eagerly longed for the coming of Christ. They said that we are saved in hope. Both we and the creation still groan in a travail—awaiting the renewal of all things.

Not to long for all that God can do is to dishonour God. It is to make ourselves the measure of all things. The consequence is that we must further and further limit what is achievable until all that we can hope for is some cloned and mechanized and administered and negotiated settlement—which puts a lid on the ferment of our unfulfilled desires.

The creative visualising movement (creating one's own reality through imagination) has no welcoming future because it has no waiting Father. Ironically, the criticism made by humanists against Christians—that they projected their fears and aspirations to formulate an idea of god—is now embraced by them. They project a future from their own ego and give this absolute value—effectively constructing a god. The Christian, in contrast to this, does not live by a projection but a prophecy, not a word of man but a word of God.

Those who have God's hope are not idealists. They can see what is so as well as the next person—and they suffer it too. But their hope of what God can do leads them to pray. Their persuasion that God has not abdicated encourages them to persevere. Their delight in the future God has foretold keeps them in expectant joy. The knowledge that the world is still personally cared for keeps them from getting embittered by the woodenness of human 'visions'.

Covenant is the way of eternal life. It's compass is the age to come, but embracing the present age. Flesh and blood are not suited to the kingdom of God. We are in a covenant relationship with Christ which requires that our mortality put on immortality in order to inherit the kingdom of God. Its compass of being co-heirs with God is too large to be circumscribed by this present life.

God's covenant with us is a prophecy and a promise. He has not just told us how things ought to be, what we must do and what will happen if we don't. He does not sit

and wait for us to 'wake up' and to 'get it right'. His covenant is his communion with us, and our participation with him in his purposes, and our growing into the likeness of his nature.

Our hope is focussed in Jesus Christ

Our hope depends on Jesus Christ having the power of an indestructible life. He has been subjected to our sins and to God's judgement on them. But God raised him from the dead. He did this specifically to show that our death has been overcome, that our hope reaches into the age to come and that our present is not to be limited by what we can envisage or manage. By the power of his resurrected, indestructible life, he represents us before God—forever.

Our major problem with the future is not that we cannot envisage it occurring but that we believe we are unworthy of it. That is why we are assured that we have a great High Priest who has entered into the presence of God on our behalf. The offering of his body for our sins is sufficient to give us a clear conscience before God and so a clear anticipation of all his favour.

Jesus has already entered the age to come—taking our humanity into the presence of God. It is important to know that the present is being administered from there. It is important to know that the life we have in covenant with God flows to us from where Christ is. The Holy Spirit brings to us the love, joy and peace of a life to which, of ourselves, we could never attain.

God has no goal for us that is not summed up in Jesus Christ. He is our future. The things to come are the things of Christ. This puts a face on the future and a loving soul to the striving's that must be part of this life. He said that he would come again and receive us to himself so that where he was there we would be also—in the place prepared for us in his Father's house.

When Christ returns and we are transformed into his image, we will know, fully, that our life has depended on Christ.

Our hope is God

From the beginning, God's purpose has been to have us trust in him for our vocation and future. This world is his and not ours. Its good works are his and not ours. Its goal is his and not ours.

There is nowhere to turn for a sure hope than God himself. There is nothing else reliable by which to be sure of these things. God could find nothing in the creation he could use to assure of what he was about in the creation other than himself. He promised us on oath that he would do as he had said. He cannot give us more hope than this. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of his promise and the Holy Spirit is God himself bearing witness to us that we are the children of God.

We know, all too painfully, that our life is not perfected yet, but we are enabled to relate to God as though we were. Hope does not disappoint us because the love of God is poured into us by the Holy Spirit. Relationships with one another, likewise, can be full of hope because we look to God and his 'timetable' rather than to our own

contrivances. Our present labours do not need to arise from the frustration's of being incomplete so much as to prepare for the full enjoyment of what is assured.

Covenant has always been about us being the people of God. The future is a relationship. What future would it be if it were not God's. What if we should make the future? What a contest we must have; what a frustration. But God will be our God and we will be his people. The question of the future resolves into this: are we going to trust ourselves or the One who has been sent from God, and has returned to God?

Suggested reading

Matthew 19:28; II Corinthians 4:18
Hebrews 6:13-20; 7:15-19; 10:19-25

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