

The Full Hope of God

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 6:1-18 / September 20, 2026

Introduction:

Hope plays a powerful function in our lives. Research has uncovered various ways hope impacts psychological and physical aspects of our experience. Some research has shown it improving educational achievement and athletic performance, even through illness or disability. Other research shows correlations between hope and recovery from surgery, long-term health, and psychological adjustments for various chronic illnesses. Chances are, we may even be able to identify the effects of hope, or lack of hope in our own lives and those we love. Consider a simple example. Every sports season begins with hope that our team will reach the big game. After multiple losses, though, that hope starts to fade. What happens? Interest in the next game drops a little, and may even dissipate all together. That's an inconsequential example, but it shows the effect of hope on our experience. It's no wonder hope is a common theme in Scripture. The Psalms are littered with hope, and the Epistles often begin or end with it. In fact, you might say the entire biblical narrative is a story of hope. So, it is no surprise that the climax of Paul's witness before the Roman authorities is hope. As he stands on trial before the unscrupulous King Agrippa, from a family with a sordid history, Paul holds nothing back and proclaims where true hope is found. And Luke's detailed account, as the longest of Paul's five public witness, places our focus on that hope to call us to respond properly. We'll cover this witness in two parts, considering the full hope of God this week, and comparing faithful and foolish responses to it next week. Dive into the narrative with me. First, we see,

Paul Insisting He Lives in the Hope of God

Remember how the stage was set. Festus confessed he found Paul committed no crime deserving of death and the dispute was related solely to Jewish theology and the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, instead of releasing Paul following his appeal to Caesar, he now needs Agrippa to help find something reasonable to write to Caesar to justify the case. Look at verses 1-3, "So Agrippa said to Paul, 'You have permission to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: 'I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.'" Note how Paul states he would make a defense against all the accusations, his thankfulness for Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish customs and controversies, and request for Agrippa's patience. This suggests Paul will give a lengthy defense of each charge. Yet, notice how he continues in verses 4-7, "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" Rather than addressing any charge, Paul focuses everything on the hope of Israel, ending with a question of God's resurrection power. What is Paul doing here? He's grounding everything in the long-awaited hope of every Jew, while clarifying the true hope. Follow the progression. He establishes his whole life was lived in that hope, being trained under the strictest party of the Jewish religion. His hope is still in the promises made by God to our fathers. The promises all of Israel hopes to attain. And this hope is what drives faithful and consistent worship of God. This sets Jewish minds and hearts on God's promises of sending a Messiah to restore Israel's glory. But note how the ending question focuses that hope on life beyond any earthly existence. What does this mean? The hope of God, which Paul has consistently referred to. The hope of Israel, which all Jews earnestly worship God in hopes to attain, is not bound to this life. It lies beyond the grave. And those focused on power in this world, treasures in the here and now, and earthly kingdoms are not truly living in the hope of God. However, those like Paul who live for the glory of Jesus Christ are living in the true hope of God.

Following this, we see,

Paul Declaring the Resurrected Christ Extends the Hope of God to All People

Pay attention to Paul's emphasis in verses 8-11. Look there with me, "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." This is the third retelling of Paul's persecution of Jesus' followers and there are two particulars surfaced in this account. First, the arrests, deaths, persecutions and his own fury against believers came from being convinced he should oppose the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus represents his presence, power and authority, along with what was said and claimed about Him, all relating to Jesus' resurrection. His resurrection proves His exaltation, which is the foundation for our proclamation. Second, those he persecuted are called saints. The Greek term speaks of those set apart and made holy, and a version of it will reappear in verse 18. These two things, the resurrection of Jesus and His holy people, are the main themes moving forward. Look at verses 12-14, "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" Luke records Paul describing his conversion in a focused way. Paul starts by making it clear that, as he was opposing the presence and power of Jesus, he found himself in the presence of the living God. His description of the light from heaven, brighter than the sun, everyone falling down, and the voice speaking in the Hebrew language are clear indicators to a Jewish mind of God's divine activity. Then, we have the new detail of Jesus saying "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." This could refer to Paul fighting his own conscience. Or, as several commentators suggest, it is a well-known Greek proverb specifically referencing opposition to deity. Richard Longenecker and Ben Witherington point to its use in the works of Euripides, Aeschylus, Terence, and Pindar. John Polhill also comments on its regular occurrence in Greek literature and how that meaning fits Paul's experience best. I'm persuaded Paul is using this Greek proverb to indicate divine activity to Greeks who were present. So, he carefully ensures both Jews and Greeks understand Jesus is God. Notice how he continues in verses 15-18, "And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'" Interestingly, Paul skips his blindness and healing, merging words from his Damascus experience, time with Ananias, and vision in Jerusalem into one story. Several things stand out about this. First, Christ's calling and commissioning become the focus of this witness. Second, Paul is a servant and witness to what he saw of Christ on the road to Damascus and things he would see of Christ in the future. Third, the wording echoes the Ezekiel's commissioning in Ezekiel 2:1 and 3, Jeremiah's in Jeremiah 1:7-8, and the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42:6-7, linking his calling directly to prominent prophets who spoke of Israel's hope. Finally, "to whom I am sending you" in the sentence construction most likely refers to both "your people" and "the Gentiles" Paul would be delivered from, making the purpose statement in verse 18 for both Jews and Gentiles. And what is that purpose statement? It is the promised hope of God. Note its allusion to Isaiah 42:6-7, where God says, "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."

This is the promise God made to His suffering servant. It is the promise fulfilled in Jesus and Paul is showing it continues through him. Now, note how Paul clarifies the hope of God. It belongs to all, Jew and Gentile alike, would turn from darkness and the power of Satan to light and the power of God, in order to receive forgiveness of sins and a place among God's set apart and holy people. Consider Paul's last statement. Place means lot, portion, and inheritance. A place among God's people is a share in the inheritance of God's people. Paul is showing emphatically that those who receive God's promised inheritance are only those with faith in Jesus. Heritage no longer matters, only a response to the gospel. Next week, Luke will focus in on varying responses to this. For this morning, I want to set our hearts deeply on the full hope of God. True and lasting hope that, when understood, will serve a powerful function in your life. Consider this hope with me. First, we have,

1) The Hope of the Forgiveness of Sins

Forgiveness of sins means canceling our record of the debt and freedom sin's power. Colossians 2:13-14 says, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands." Paul proclaimed in Acts 13:38-39, "that through this [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." Family, this forgiveness like our, where we remember every wrong and struggle to love those who committed them. God says in Isaiah 43:25, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." And Psalm 103:10-12 says, "[God] does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." In Christ, God will not remember our sins, but removes them and never deals with us according to them. Instead, we receive His great steadfast love always working for us. What hope! Second, we have,

2) The Hope of a Place Among God's Set Apart and Holy People

Forgiveness is the beginning of our hope. In Christ, we have a place among the people of God. We are, as Paul says in Galatians 3:29, "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Family, take this in. We are God's beloved. Recount all the promises God made to Abraham and his offspring. The ways He provided and interceded for Israel in the Old Testament. The ways He watched over David. The ways He stood by and protected Paul. Through faith in Christ, you have a place with those people. God sets us apart, just as He did them. God places His eye upon us, just as He did them. God becomes our refuge and strength, just as He did them. We don't receive fringe benefits. We are His people and He is our God. What hope! But it doesn't end there. Third, we have,

3) The Hope of an Eternal Inheritance

This hope culminates in an eternal inheritance, of which there are two great blessings. To be like Jesus, and to be with Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:49 says, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." One of the greatest promises of the resurrection is that we might one day be like Christ. 1 John 3:1-2 says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.... Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." Family, think about this with me. We will be like Jesus one day. Perfect in holiness and without the stain of sin. Those things you wrestle with that you so desperate desire to be rid of, will one day be gone. Why? Because we shall see Him as He is. We will be with Jesus, living in His presence, where fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore. What hope! Church, understanding and clinging to that hope has a powerful function in your life. John continues in 1 John 3:3, "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." I am persuaded it is one of the primary reasons Paul remains calm, bold, and faithful in the midst of so much hardship, is the hope he stood in.

Conclusion:

So, as the worship team comes for our time of response, I want to make sure we understand how we live in that hope. We live in this hope by trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and setting our gaze upon him. Hebrews 9:22 & 26 tells us, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins... and [Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." His blood is the only sufficient atonement for our sin. And His resurrection is the ground of our resurrection hope. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17-21, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead." The true hope of God is only found in Jesus, and that hope belongs to all who have faith in Jesus. Ensure that is your hope, dwell on it, and see if it doesn't have a powerful effect on your daily life. Would you pray with me as we prepare to respond?