



Wishful thinking? Or Blessed Hope!

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus (Titus 2:11-13 NASB)

Paul's epistles to his pastoral protégés, Timothy and Titus, include some of the New Testament's boldest texts when it comes to placing our hope in Jesus Christ.

For example, Paul tells us about what God wants. "He desires **all people** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Some theologians don't believe this. They would rather Paul had said, "all Christians" or "all of the elect." But he didn't. This is one case where "**all**" means **all**.

Not that everyone will somehow enjoy salvation magically or automatically. There are some specific means to this end.

One of those means, in Paul's view, is prayer. To this end, Paul says, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for **all people** ..." (1 Timothy 2:1).

And while prayer is necessary in Paul's model, he knows there is other work to be done as well.

"We labor and strive for this, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of everyone, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10).

The labor to which he refers is the mission of sharing the good news of God's love and grace for everyone, to everyone, expressed most beautifully in the gift of God's Son, Jesus.

Why did Paul consider this striving? For the very religious, whether Jewish hardliners or Gentile idolaters, the good news stood as a

threat to status quo spirituality, resting as it did in their own righteousness.

The love and grace of God subvert every such system, and that meant sharing it got Paul in a lot of hot water. Some say half his ministry years were spent in various prisons.

Paul says, on the one hand, that God-in-Christ is the Savior of **all** (and "all" still means **all**). So why say "*especially*" for those who believe? Quite simply, because those who already believe God loves them can enjoy that love today.

Those who believe God has forgiven them can enjoy freedom from guilt and shame right now. Those who believe in God's Son have already stepped into the joy of the eternal life to come.

So, Paul is into praying and preaching now

because the world suffers now. The world suffers from not knowing and not believing the grace and love that is already theirs in Christ.

In addition to praying for and preaching to everyone, everywhere, that they would receive the beautiful gospel,

Paul believed this saving Grace had *already appeared to all people* (Titus 2:11) as a person—none other than Christ himself. **Jesus Christ IS the grace** that has appeared, in the flesh, for the whole world.

He is also the "**blessed hope**" that *will appear*. That is, we don't just hope that Christ saves—Christ IS the Hope who certainly *will save*.

No, our hope is not merely the wishful thinking of those who cross their fingers for good luck.

Our Hope is as firm and sure as the cross of Christ and his good news. Our Hope is a living Person, the Grace and Salvation who has appeared and will surely appear again.

So, we join our hope to those Christians who first prayed, "*Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!*" □

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