

The Way of Love

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Hope That Does Not Disappoint

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Paul wrote from prison words that resonate through the centuries: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* He was not speaking as one who fears death. He was speaking as one who knows there is something on the other side — something better, something that makes present chains seem light in comparison.

Christian hope is not vague optimism or illusion for comfort. It is anchored in a historical event: the resurrection of Jesus. *"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep,"* says Paul. If Christ rose, then death does not have the last word. If he conquered the grave, we too will conquer it in him.

Jesus himself promised: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."* These words he spoke at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, moments before demonstrating his power over death. They were not philosophical theory. They were a declaration of authority.

What does this mean for how we live today? It means we can face difficulties with an eternal perspective. Paul puts it this way: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."* He does not minimize suffering — Paul knew suffering better than most — but he places it in context.

It also means that farewells are not final. *"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope."* Grief is real and necessary. Jesus himself wept at Lazarus's tomb. But Christian grief is tinged with hope. It is not goodbye forever but "see you later."

John had a vision of the end of all things: *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* One day, everything will be restored. Everything that sin broke will be healed. Every injustice will be corrected. Every true love will be reunited.

In the meantime, we live in the "already but not yet." We are already children of God, but what we will be has not yet fully appeared. We already have the Spirit as a guarantee of the inheritance, but we do not yet possess it in its totality. We walk by faith, not by sight.

This hope does not make us passive before the world's suffering or indifferent to justice. On the contrary — because we know the Kingdom is coming, we work for it to come. Because we believe in final restoration, we participate in present restoration. We feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, care for the sick — not because we think we will solve all problems, but because this is what the Kingdom looks like, and we want it to be seen now.

Christian hope does not disappoint, Paul says, "*because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*" It is not hope built on our merits or on favorable circumstances. It is hope anchored in the character of God — and he is faithful.