

Rejoice in Hope

Romans 5:1-11

There was a teacher who was assigned to a program of tutoring students who needed to be in the hospital for long periods of time. She received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She took the child's name and room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher. "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind."

The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had mentioned to her that the boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told him, "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs." When she left she felt she hadn't accomplished much.

But the next day, a nurse asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. "No, no," said the nurse. "You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live."

Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He expressed it this way: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?" The young boy now had hope he was going to live.

(Bits & Pieces, July 1991. <http://www.christianglobe.com/illustrations/>)

In this scripture from Romans we see the words "*Rejoice in Hope.*" Without hope we have nothing. Without hope in something that is outside of ourselves we have nothing. Hope in ourselves will not sustain us in those times of fierce trials, tribulation and testing that comes upon us. Yes, hope has to be something outside of ourselves.

A self-made millionaire Eugene Lang, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Lang had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him.

Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

(Parade Magazine. <http://www.christianglobe.com/illustrations/>)

Hope means having faith or trusting when things are hopeless. As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is merely a trite, or stale wishing; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.

Faith, Hope, Trust are all linked to a basic meaning. They mean basically the same thing with only slight variances. What is hope? This is my definition of the word hope, faith, & trust in a nutshell: It is the well grounded, well founded, confident expectation that comes through experience in something outside of our selves. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; the triune Godhead, the Trinity.

Romans 5: 3 & 4 (KJV) ***And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope:***

Paul tell us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that we are to "glory in trials and tribulations". That means that we are to delight in, be jubilant because of, rejoice even while we are in the tribulation. That we are to triumph over the tribulation, crisis's, and stresses even when the great pressing down seem to stop our very soul from breathing.

While we are struggling with this tribulation we are told to have "patience". Patience or perseverance is the characteristic of a person who is not swerved from their deliberate purpose and their loyalty to faith and piety even when the greatest trials and sufferings comes. It isn't hunkering down behind a fortress. It's getting into and staying in the battle through the Power of God. With our patience we will get godly "Experience". Experience is something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through. We can also get experience by direct observation Experience with God should give us peace and hope in our lives. I am who I am today because of the experiences, the tribulations, the trials that God has brought me through.

Because of our experiences we shouldn't be ashamed. We are to stand tall. Lift up our heads and smile, laugh and rejoice in hope. Hope is our well grounded, well founded, confident expectation that comes through experience in God because of the blood, the death, of Jesus on a cross and the power of the Holy Spirit living within us.

Romans 5:4-5 " ***When we are strong to take trouble, we prove that we believe. When we prove that we believe, we have hope. We will not be disappointed by this hope. God has given us the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit has put God's love in our hearts.***"

Christian hope proves we believe... believe in God and His son Jesus Christ. Believe that they can and will cover us with their love. Christian hope is our way of coping with life. Christian hope is to receive his salvation and to be firmly grounded in Gods Love. As Christians, hope is central to our faith. Hope rests in the understanding that we are not alone in our sufferings. Because of God's grace we can learn how to endure our sufferings, which produce character, which springs into hope. This is a promise we can stand on. Jesus, who endured all things for us, offers to us His strength by which we can endure. As Paul said, "***I can do all things in Christ, who strengthens me.***"

Hope is critical. So critical that, "hope" is repeated three times in our scripture. The first time, is "our hope of sharing the glory of God." Having this hope is great because we can know that God will be faithful to us, and that no matter what may happen now, our hope for the future is secure.

This security leads us to the second hope in verse four, where we find that hope is at the end of a chain of events that begins with suffering. Now it doesn't seem like suffering and hope would have much in common, aside from the fact that most people would hope that their suffering would end!

The words in verse three, "we boast in our sufferings", don't mean that Christians should go looking for ways to get hurt. Listen carefully. The verse says boast **IN** our sufferings, not **BECAUSE** of our sufferings. As Christians, we can boast in our sufferings because we know that our suffering is not meaningless. Our suffering is just part of God's process. We have to accept the reality of suffering in our lives, trusting God to help us through them. You see, God can do great things with those who trust Him in the tough times as well as the easy ones.

And the third time, in verse five, we read **"... hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."**

This is a hope of which we can be certain. When we reach the stage of hope we will realize that God does love us. Which leads us to this promise & the core of this message: "God proves his love for us, in that while we still were sinners, Christ died for us." That is the fulfillment of the promise God made back in Isaiah 53. We didn't deserve it. We didn't earn it. But God, through Jesus, as an act of love, kept His promise and saved us.

The Hebrews in the desert didn't deserve water. God gave it to them. The crowd by the lakeside didn't deserve food. Jesus gave it to them. Lazarus didn't deserve a second chance at life. Jesus gave it to him anyway. As sinners, we don't deserve anything, says Paul. But God, out of love, gives us what we need anyway. No one promised us it would be easy when we became Christians. No one promised us we would never get sick, never have any problems, always choose the quickest line at the grocery store, or our children would be perfect. We weren't promised a perfect life. What we were promised is that no matter how much we suffer, if we learn to endure our sufferings and grow through them, we will end up at hope. We will get what we need, when we need it. God promised it. And that's a promise we can stand on.

To the Christian, hope is central to our faith. And as Christian we live with a hope that is secured by no one less than God himself, and his Son Jesus Christ. God has promised that those who love him will live with him for ever - and that the life we spend with him will be free for all the things which cause us pain and suffering now. Titus 2:13 **" while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"**

Jesus, when he left the earth weeks after his resurrection, made a promise that he would physically and personally return to bring his children home. We do not place our hope in a mystic idea or a set of ideas - we place it in a real person - Jesus Christ - who has promised to make our hopes reality, in person!

And finally, as Christians, we live in hope - not just hoping for good things in the future, but living with hope as an ever-present reality in our lives. Listen to Ephesians 1:18 **"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints"**.

As followers of Christ, we are anchored to nothing less than Christ himself - so may we as his children live lives that show this hope to be alive and real. When we're called to task for our faith, may our hope leave our critics silent, even wanting. When we're hit by tragedy, may we realize that no matter how severe it is, that there is nothing that can extinguish the hope that God gives, and that with God's help we can even make tragedy work for us, and lead us closer to lives full of hope. And may the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives lead us to live lives full of hope, Hope that steadies our hearts in the present and prepares us for the future, and leads us to do things for God which would be "hopeless" without Him.

Through Christ's death and resurrection God revealed to those who would believe in Christ a heavenly mystery hidden in ages past. In Colossians 1:24-27 Paul reveals this mystery, ***"hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."***

What is Paul referring to? What is this hope of glory? In Genesis 1 we read of how God created mankind in God's own image. We were created to be like God, to reflect God's glorious nature. What things do you hope for? What do you desire in your heart of hearts to have take place in your life? Financial security? A promotion at work? An increase in your salary? Good grades for your children? But then the problems set in: you over extend yourself financially, you're laid off from work, your children have difficulty in school. Whatever it might be there is some group, corporation, program out there, claiming that they can help you get back on track, restore you, to where you once were before tragedy befell you. There are: money lenders; credit managers; job head hunters; programs to improve your children's grades. You name it, it's available, and they may even be able to do what they claim.

There is just one problem, no human agency can restore your soul. When sin entered into the world that divine image in which God formed us was broken, it was damaged, was marred. "For all have sinned," says Paul, "and fallen short of the glory of God." But Christ came into the world to restore us to our original glory. To remold us in the image of our creator. To bestow upon us divine grace.

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

Christ came to give us eternal life. An eternal life that is more than simply spending eternity with God. It's about sharing God's eternal nature, His glory. Listen to this, ***"Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality."***
I Corinthians 15:51-53

This is the hope that God calls us to put our faith in; a hope that is found in Jesus Christ. For Christ is the first fruit of the resurrection of the dead and the Holy Spirit is our down payment until that day. "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, be all that God created you to be. Know that ***Christ in you is the hope of Glory now and forever. Amen.***

Let us pray,

Dear God, we confess that when we are confronted with tribulations and crises in our lives, we hunger and thirst for quick solutions and often blame you and others when an immediate solution doesn't happen. We realize that Jesus promised to satisfy our thirst through the gift of his life in us - as living water welling up within us providing a source of unending power, confidence and real hope. Forgive us when we look to material and physical sources to satisfy our thirst for meaning in our lives. As rain replenishes and softens the dry, hard ground, replenish and soften our hearts with the living water that only Christ can give. In the great hope and in his name we pray. Amen
