

**"Blessed Hope"
(Romans 5:1-11)
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December 3, 2017**

(Romans 5:1-11)

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⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Core Idea: We must place our hope in Christ in which we have the assurance of salvation and eternal life.

Opposing Idea: We place our hope in things that are uncertain and temporary.

Good afternoon, church. Today marks the beginning of Advent. The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming". Advent symbolizes the waiting and hoping in prayerful expectation for the coming of the Messiah. We look back in celebration of when Jesus Christ came while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ's kingdom when He returns for His people. I think today's passage is very fitting which is Romans 5:1-11. So, if you can open up your Bibles. It's on page 914 in the red Bibles in front of you. Keep your finger there as a bookmark. Before we read the passage, I want to ask a question: What is hope?

Hope is something we all need. Without hope, it's a struggle to wake up each morning. Without hope, it is difficult to live with motivation and purpose. But, what is hope? Have you ever thought about that? And why do we place our hope in... you fill in the blank? John Piper wrote that "Hope is like a reservoir of emotional strength". He was asked once, "What are some of your feelings when you forgive someone?" He replied with, "One of my first thoughts was that I have to have the feeling of hope in order to forgive instead of retaliate."

What is Piper saying? For example, when you're feeling down, discouraged, hurt... And we've ALL felt that way in the past and possibly in the present... you must look to the emotional reservoir of hope for strength to return good for evil. Without hope, you have no power to absorb the wrong or hurt and faithfully walk in love. Without hope, you fall into self-pity or even self-justification. We've all dealt with moments of hopelessness.

Today, I want us to look at three questions: 1. What is hope? I'm not talking about looking up the Webster's dictionary and finding the definition of hope; but what does the Bible say about hope – what is the biblical definition of hope? 2. Why is this hope so important and unique? Why do I need this hope? And 3. Where can I get this hope? With that in mind, let's read Romans 5:1-11 together.

Follow along as I read:

Romans 5:1-11 (NIV)

Peace and Hope

⁵ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

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Before we get into Paul's understanding of hope, there are three ways I think you and I use the word "hope". Or at least there are three different ways in which we use the word "hope". Hope is:

1. A desire for something good in the future,
2. The thing in the future that we desire, and
3. The basis or reason for thinking that our desire may indeed be fulfilled.

First, what does it mean that hope is a desire for something good in the future? Well, think of a child hoping for their mommy or daddy to come home early after work so that they can play with them after dinner. The child desires for mom or dad to come home early so that they can experience something good, which is playing with them.

Secondly, hope is also a good thing in the future that we are desiring. We say, "I hope that John will arrive safely." John's safe arrival is the object of our hope. It's a good thing in the future we desire. I'm sure no one would hope that John doesn't arrive safely.

The third way we use the word "hope" is the reason why our hope might come to pass; or come true. For example, I wake up in the morning and I hope that the traffic is not bad so that I would arrive at church on time. Less traffic is the reason I may in fact be on time. That is my hope.

All three uses of "hope" are found in the Bible. However, there is something very distinct about biblical hope that is not present in the three uses/examples we just went through. And this is very important: When we use the word "hope", we express uncertainty rather than certainty. Let me say that again: When we use the word "hope", we express uncertainty rather than certainty.

Case in point, the child's hope that their parent would come home early to play with them: the child does not have any certainty that mommy or daddy will come home early, he/she only desires it. When I hope that John arrives safely, I don't know if he will or not, but that's my desire. When I'm hoping that traffic isn't bad so that I can be on time for work, I don't know if the traffic will be clear. Who knows, there could be an accident or bad weather causing drivers to drive 10km/hour. I just don't know.

When we express hope, we are expressing uncertainty. The best example I can give: I hope that the Toronto Maple Leafs will win the Stanley Cup. I genuinely desire for them to win. Will they? That's a huge uncertainty. I've been disappointed my whole life, and yet, when a new season rolls along, hope is renewed. But, this is NOT the biblical meaning of hope. The main thing Scripture shows us is that biblical hope is not just a desire for something good in the future, but rather, as Piper writes, **"Biblical hope is a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future."**

Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future; it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen, it is confident that it will happen. What we hope for will be done. That's the definition of hope in the Bible.

In today's text, the word hope is found 3 times in the first 5 verses. Paul says that "we boast in the hope of the glory of God" (v.2). He also gives us a progression from suffering to hope: "but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope" (v.3-4). And finally, Paul also says that "hope does not put us to shame" (v.5). Let's take a look at what each of these means.

First, we boast in the HOPE of the glory of God... what does that mean? Paul uses the word "boast" in other letters that he wrote to churches. Boasting means to congratulate oneself. You congratulate yourself upon something that you have succeeded in doing, or something that you have received; some favour that has been shown to you. What do you boast in? School marks? Reputation? Career? Family? We all have something we boast in. The word boast here doesn't relate to something that you did but rather something that you received.

Martin Lloyd Jones explains it like this: Paul is "looking forward to it [the glory of God] with confidence, he is looking forward to it with assurance". For Paul, his boasting was in this confidence and assurance. This is what excited him. If he was here today, he'd say something like this: "If you are a Christian, a believer of Jesus Christ, you believe that you've been justified by faith (v.1). So then, if you realize this wonderful truth, should you not be boasting? Should you not be rejoicing in the fact that you've received salvation; that God has shown favour on you?" For Paul, the wonderful truth that you have been justified MUST lead you to boasting. As he awaited spending eternity with God in heaven, he faithfully and joyfully served Him until his last breath.

We must boast in Jesus like Paul did. We must rejoice because Christ has saved us. We must have confidence in knowing that we will be with Jesus in heaven one day and that must affect the way we live. Nothing on this earth should sway us from rejoicing and boasting in Christ; even suffering. And that's the next point: how we can have hope in our sufferings.

Paul is showing us the way in which our faith enables us to face trials and suffering. And how we deal with our suffering is proof, or evidence, that we are saved. Dr. Lloyd Jones wrote, "There is no more important, and no more subtle test of our profession of the Christian faith than the way we react to the trials and the troubles and the tribulations of life in this world". The way to test the true and the false is to observe what happens in the hour of crisis, in the time of real need. Our faith should give us the perseverance to endure suffering so that it produces hope.

Trials and suffering is needed to refine our faith. Faith deepens when you are tested. Not only tested, but proven to withstand the trials that come. Therefore, salvation is not just an emotional feeling that makes you feel good. But as your faith is being tested, the rootedness of Christ deepens. Jesus taught a parable about the Sower and the four different grounds in which the seed falls. One of the grounds was rocky ground.

This what Jesus said,

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. **(Matthew 13:20-21)**

Are we like the rocky ground? Are we quick to lose hope and fall away when suffering comes?

Ok, so, how do we get from suffering to hope? Well, suffering can mean afflictions, pressures, stresses, difficulties, illnesses or maybe persecution. How do we respond to these things? I confess, I usually complain and grumble about it. And I let these negative thoughts stew in my mind way too long. But that's not how the Bible teaches us to deal with suffering. We are told to "glory in our sufferings". But, why and how?

The Bible says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance". We must rejoice because of sufferings.

What does that look like then? It doesn't mean we should be glad when horrible things happen. It doesn't mean we become robotic and praise God when terrible things happen to us. Suffering is NOT pleasant. Rejoicing and glorying in our suffering is not automatic; it's a process and progression. When trials come, at first you're troubled, hurt, sad, but, you don't stop there. You proceed to dealing with it. And it is faith that enables us to view our sufferings in a way that helps us to realize hope. If we see that suffering is the test of our faith, we begin to understand God's purpose in it. We can rejoice in suffering because we know that it produces perseverance and patience. The important word is "produces". Again, it's not automatic. But it's a process.

Perseverance is developing a steadfastness -- a steadfastness is refocusing our attention to God and patiently waiting for Him to work and produce endurance in our faith. Many times when we go through trials, it's possible that we've lost sight of God or have been neglecting Him. Trials and tribulations may come in order that we would pause and see what God is wanting to speak or do in our lives. Our faith should lead us back to Him and in our sufferings, deepen our trust and dependence on Him. Therefore, suffering produces perseverance. Then, perseverance produces character.

The word "character" can be translated to "proof" or "proven", or "stand to test". In other words, our patient endurance leads to a proof that we are really and truly Christian. We have passed the test. What patience and perseverance does is it tests our faith. But Paul goes a step further and says that being tested lead us to rejoice. Why? It's the simple fact that God testing us is proof in and of itself that we are His children. It is very suspicious when a Christian, or anyone for that matter, has never gone through suffering. The hope that we have in our suffering, then, is that God is working and intervening in our lives and that in Him, we will never fail. Our hope is in being reminded of the salvation only He can give us and the future glory we will partake in later. Finally, when we persevere in suffering and stand the test, our love for God and trust in Him deepens.

Lastly, Paul writes that “Hope does not put us to shame”. This is the climax. Paul is referring to both the present and the future -- the reality and the promise. The promise is that for those who hope in Christ Jesus, they will not be disappointed on Judgment Day when Jesus returns, but also, the reality is that this hope is available in this life and in this world as well. You will have trials, there will be problems, there will be difficulties and tribulations, but if you have this hope, you will never be ashamed, you will never be disappointed, you will never feel let down. This is a result of your faith; in what you believe. As you affirm your faith and remain steadfast and bold, there is nothing on this earth that can break you down.

I think of the stories I’ve read about Christian martyrs being burned to death during the Reformation. They are told to renounce their faith but they refuse. And as they are burning at the stake, for hours, they are singing and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus by reciting Scripture. What could they be possibly thinking as they are nearing their painful death? Could it be that in their darkest moment, they had this hope? Could it be that though physically they are in excruciating pain, they can rejoice because they knew Jesus and what He had done for them and knew where they will be very soon; with Jesus? They boasted in that they will be with the Lord for all eternity. Only when you’ve been refined in fire like that can your faith withstand any and all suffering! We all suffer. We all need hope.

This is hope: that we boast in the present and future assurance (which is certain), that we rejoice in suffering as we stand the test, and that we will not be put to shame, both here in this world and after. So, why is it so important? Why do we need this hope?

We need this hope because it is the only way to salvation. There is no way anyone can understand this hope without this fundamental truth: Hope is based on the foundation of faith. There is nothing we can do to obtain this hope. It is purely God’s initiative and how did He initiate? Through love.

In verse 6 it reads, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still **powerless**, Christ died for the ungodly.” The problem that we see is that we are powerless. Paul is emphasizing that there is nothing we can do to address our sin problem: our violation against God. In the Bible it says that “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. The same “glory” we are to boast in, we cannot earn or work for. We are powerless; we were utterly incapable of making any atonement for our transgressions, or of delivering ourselves from the depth of guilt and misery. We do not have power to put away the wrath of God. No matter what plan we attempt to make, we are unable to save ourselves from God’s divine justice. We cannot secure our own salvation. We are powerless and ungodly.

Paul mentions two types of people someone might die for: the righteous person and the good person. A righteous person is an upright, law-abiding person. And a good person is someone who is good to you. A righteous person may be someone you know and it could be a stranger. A righteous person could be a teacher, possibly someone with status. A good person usually you have a relationship with -- family, friends, fellow church members. These people you would be more inclined to die for, but what Paul is trying to point out is not the difference between a righteous and good person, but rather that it is uncommon for a person to sacrifice his/her own life in order to save the life of even someone of high character. Still, fewer people are inclined to give their lives to save a person they know to be wicked. Human love, at its best, will motivate a person to give his or her life for a truly “good” person, but even that love cannot save someone from the eternal wrath of God.

God proved His love for us by sending Jesus Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Notice that Paul uses the word “still” twice in the text. In Greek, the word is “eti” which is translated as “remains”. Therefore, what Paul is saying is that though we remain sinners, Christ died for us! He didn’t give His life for us because we were good people who were deserving of His kindness; His sacrifice was based solely on His love for us. Therefore, we can be certain that we cannot lose His love (and consequently our salvation) because we didn’t do anything to earn it in the first place.

Paul establishes that salvation comes only on the basis of God's grace through faith. Man's only part in becoming saved is to receive forgiveness and reconciliation freely in faith from God's gracious hand. Faith is the only way to salvation.

God loved us that He sent His Son Jesus to die for us. Because of His love for us, Jesus paid the penalty of our sins. To know His love and to be saved by faith is a gift, but the fruit of God's love and the assurance of salvation by faith is... HOPE.

The last question to ask is, "How can I get this hope?" The answer: It is only by faith we receive this hope. When you wake up each morning, you wake up in the hopes for the best future (job, marriage, family, success). And that motivates you in the present to work hard, but still, no matter how hard you work, nothing is certain. The hope that comes in love and by faith is a precious, blessed gift. That if you simply believe, you will have it. Paul begins and ends this portion of his letter with the phrase, "Since we have been justified through faith (v.1) and by His blood (v.9)" "Since" meaning that it has already happened. In other words, since you have been saved by faith, you are now reconciled with God. The debt has been paid. You are no longer an enemy of God but now His child. You are at peace with God (v.1). THEREFORE, boast in the hope of the glory of God. This hope is a by-product of our faith in Jesus and we see the power of this hope.

What do you place your hope in? Circumstances, situations, dreams, people... everything is uncertain. There are many good things in this world, but even when you've accomplished, achieved, or obtained it... what's the end result? This is a question we should be asking ourselves: "Is my hope built on uncertain and temporary things, or is it built on something that is certain and eternal?" Actually, there is one thing that is certain: we will all die at some point. Where will you end up when you die? There is an invitation for every person in this room.

Let me speak to those who are not Christians in this room. God loves you. He demonstrated His love for you by sending Jesus to die for you; that you would be reconciled with God and may have peace with Him and that's a certain thing. He loves you even with all your baggage. No matter what you've gone through and going through, He loves you so much and He has this gift ready for you to simply take: and that gift is salvation. He wants you to by faith call on Him and believe that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour. That He hung on the cross and died for your sins. All you need to do is believe; have faith. This gift of love, faith, and hope is waiting for you today, right now. Won't you receive it?

For those who are Christian, when I was around 17 years old, my parents bought me an Xbox. For 17 years of my life I begged them for a game console. They said no, but out of nowhere, I got it. It was probably the most used gift I've ever received. At one point, my life probably revolved around playing Xbox. I'd invite everyone over to play with it, I devoted hours upon hours losing sleep over it. Xbox could have been my best friend at one time. That's probably a bad example but, that's how much we should cherish this blessed hope that has been given to us. You don't need to search for this hope, you have it! Don't let this gift of hope get unused and buried under all the distractions of this life and world. My hope and prayer is that you will boast in the hope of the glory of God; that you will live each moment of your life in the hope that comes from you being saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Live in hope, be a beckon of hope; hope that is found in God and His Word.

As we begin Advent, may we celebrate and boast in what Christ has already done and hope in the future glory we will share with Him for all eternity.

Let's pray.