

Hope

Romans 15:13

George Crawford, May 23, 2021

Good morning, it's May 23rd, 2021. This is the worship service at Grace Fellowship in Chilliwack, British Columbia. When I was given the opportunity to preach there, I asked Jeremy, if there was a topic that he had in mind. He indicated that something having to do with hope would be desirable. When he did so, my mind was drawn immediately to a number of passages in the New Testament, many of which we'll talk about today. One of the first of course, would be Hebrews 11:1. In the Old King James, it tells us, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." My mind, however, was drawn to Romans 15:13, which I believe is probably the most comprehensive and succinct development of what should characterize the hope of believers that we find in the New Testament. So if you would, please open your Bible to Romans 15, verse 13. Paul writes,

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Father, I pray that you would allow us this morning to understand your Word, that you would allow me to be able to articulate what you would have these believers to understand, even now we ask your enabling, amen. Now, the first thing that has to be done, if we wish to understand any passage of Scripture, including this particular verse, is to ask questions of it. And one of the initial questions that needs to be raised is what do we mean by the key term or terms that are used in it. And in this case, of course, that term would be the word 'hope'. In the Greek the word is 'elpis', we find a variation on that term, the word elpiso, which is translated, and you find this in 1 Peter 1:3, as a living hope. Typically, basically, it is an expectation in the New Testament, when it is used, it generally refers to expectations of good, good things to come, good experiences, that we look forward to. A basic illustration and one that should bring back fond memories to each of us, the expectation of hope, the hope that kids will have on Christmas morning, perhaps for some of you, it would be Christmas Eve, but they look at those packages, and they expect good things to come. Now, what is the relationship between faith and hope? I already mentioned Hebrews 11:1.

One of the most helpful sources that we can consider comes from John Calvin. Calvin, the great reformer tells us that wherever this living faith exists, the faith that justifies, it must have the hope of eternal life, as its inseparable companion. In one word, hope is nothing more than the expectation of those things, which faith previously believes to have been truly promised by God. Thus, faith believes that God is true, hope expects that in due season, He will manifest His truth. Faith believes that He is our father. Hope expects that He will always act the part of a father towards us. Faith believes that eternal life has been given to us, hope expects that it will one day be revealed. Faith is the foundation on which

hope rests. Hope nourishes and sustains faith. In short, hope is nothing else, according to Calvin, than the food and strength of faith.

Now, the next question that we have to ask ourselves is, why is it, or how is it that Paul uses the expression, the God of hope? How is it that our God can be rightly thought of as being the God of hope? To understand that, we have to initially start with the character or the attributes of God. Ultimately, when all is said and done, God's attributes will provide the foundation of our hope. It is difficult to consider any ground for hope, outside of, in some ways, the character or the attributes of God, as depicted in Scripture.

Start off with, of course, His sovereignty. Isaiah 6, Isaiah records and this is familiar to many of us: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord lifted up and seated on His throne." He was sovereign over all creation. He is sovereign over everything that will happen to us in the course of our lives. Psalms 103:19 reminds us that the sovereign God is the One whom our soul should bless, and who provides us with good things and who renews our youth. Psalms 135:5-6, our God is in heaven, He does what He will.

He is omniscient. Isaiah 40 tells us that people very discouraged, somewhat like us, wonder if God is aware of what's going on in their lives. And he says in response to them, consider that God holds each of the stars in the palm of His hand, He knows them by name, and because of His sovereign control, not one of them is missing. If the God who knows each of the stars by name does so, we can count on the fact that He will know what is happening in each of our lives. He is not so busy focusing on the grandeur and the expanse of His creation, that He will overlook any one specific part of it.

He is omnipresent. Where can I go from his presence? Psalm 139: "If I ascend to the heavens, you're there, if I go to the depths of the sea, I cannot escape your presence." He is omnipresent, we cannot find any part of the created order in which we are away from or outside of His presence. To that need to be considered together. Because we sometimes question either God's love for us or His power to do things, to resolve the crisis that we are finding ourselves under. We have to remember at one and the same time, the sovereign God is both omnipotent, He is all powerful, and He is all loving. He is powerful enough to resolve all of the crises that we will encounter in the course of a life, and He is all loving. He wishes nothing but the best for His glory and for our good. We read that in Romans 8:28.

The character quality that sticks out the most however, in Isaiah 6, is God's holiness. He is sinless. He is pure. He is separated from evil. God's holiness, it is God's holiness that is the source of one of the qualities that we should draw greatest encouragement from, and that is His justice or His justness. None other than Charles Spurgeon describes a woman who on her deathbed was drawing comfort from the justness of God and His words, Spurgeon writes, "A good old saint, who lately lay dying told her pastor that she was resting on the justice of God. The good man thought she had chosen a strange point of the Divine character to rest on. But she explained, I rest in His justice to migrate substitute, that He would

not let Him die for me in vain.” I rest in His justice, to migrate substitute, that He would not let Him die for me in vain. The woman was right, we rightly can draw encouragement from God's justice and justness in that regard. Our sins have been paid for, those of us who have trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior, they will not be held against us.

Finally, God is faithful to His Word and His promises. Near the end of his life, Joshua reflected upon this twice in Joshua 21:45 and Joshua 23:14. Twice he reminds the people of Israel, that during the time that they were conquering Palestine, not one of God's promises had failed, he uses the expression, or fallen to the ground. God is faithful to His Word, Psalm 13. He has exalted His name and His Word above all things, what He has promised, will come to pass. So that's the character and the attributes of God that are the basis or foundation of our hope. He is the source of that hope. He is the communicated source of our hope. Our hope is from Him. Our hope is based upon His propositional revelation of Himself. And in addition to that, He is the object of our hope, we hope in Him.

Luther in his commentary on Romans writes the following rhetorical question, how is He the God of hope? He answers it with the following statement, “He is the giver of hope, and He is honored by hope.” We dishonor God, if we do not hope in Him, if we do not take Him at His word, and nothing provides greater honor to Him, than when we do hope in Him when we hope in His Word, when we wait expectantly for it to be accomplished in our lives. Further answering the question, how is he the God of hope? We look to the context of this particular passage. In the verse immediately before Romans 15:13, Romans 15:12, we read the following (New American Standard Bible). Again, Isaiah says, “There shall come the root of Jesse, and He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles hope.” In Him shall the Gentiles hope. From the outset, there has been an international character to the gospel. In the Great Commission, Christ instructed His followers to go into all of the world and preach the gospel. We who live in Southern California, we who live in Canada, can all be grateful that there has been an international character to the gospel. More than that, there has been a character of going beyond the requirements of Judaism to be justified with God. Under the gospel, the old sacrificial system was made to end. We now, those of us who are Gentiles by ethnic background, have been brought near being justified by faith, and faith alone. So the character of the gospel itself is demonstrated in this particular passage. Now, he says as a result of that, as a result of the text telling us that in him, the Gentiles will hope. It's an easy transition to Romans 15:13, where he says, now may the God of hope, do certain things within our lives.

But there's another aspect that should not be overlooked. Paul is quoting from the Septuagint. When he ends, Romans 15:12, with the statement “in Him will the Gentiles hope”, the same statement is made by Matthew in Matthew 12:21, in his commentary on Christ's response to human opposition. But there's something else that should not be overlooked. And you need to open your Bible to see what I'm talking about, to the actual text of Isaiah 11:10. So quickly flip over to that passage, reading from the English Standard Version, “In that day, the root of Jesse who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations enquire.” Using the Septuagint and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the phrase ‘of

him shall the nations enquire' now reads, in Romans 15:12, "in Him the Gentiles will hope." But there is another phrase that immediately follows and you'll see this in your copy before you: "and His resting place shall be glorious." His resting place shall be glorious. The close proximity of that phrase, to the concept of hope, supports an inference that hope can be found, and in a sense, places us in God's glorious resting place. Now, what does that mean? Is this the place where the omnipotent God rests? By phrasing the question, we realize that the answer to that has to be no, it has to be the rest which God provides. That rest is described as being glorious. Put another way, that resting place is described as being glorious. It has a touch to it, of God's glory. In an absolute minimum, hope in God is an essential and inseparable part of the rest that He provides. We see that in Psalm 37:7, and Psalm 91:1, that rest has a touch of the presence of God, the glory of God in it. That rest, that hope, however, is not a rest of sloth, of sleepiness, of idleness or complacency. To the contrary, it is a rest, that the passage we're looking at this morning, rightly incites us to diligent and patient, abounding labor. We see that in 1 Corinthians 15:58. So yes, God is our hope. He is the God of our hope. He has instilled it within us, and He is the object of our hope and in providing that hope, He provides a certain amount of glorious rest.

Now continuing with the verse that we're looking at this morning. What does Paul request? What does he ask about the believers hope? At its core, Romans 15:13 is a prayer. Paul is bringing that request, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to God Himself, requesting that it be true of the believers hope. There are three things that we see. First of all, it is characterized by joy. It is characterized by joy, that joy is a familiar term 'chara', it could just as easily be translated delight. Our hope should be characterized by delight, delight in what? Delight in what God is doing in our lives, delight in seeing Him in sovereign control, and directing the outcome of the circumstances in the crises, which we encounter. It is characterized by peace. Peace, public peace, the common word used in the Greek, freedom from war. It involves peace between persons, and most significantly, it involves spiritual peace, or peace between man and his God.

Now, the text tells us that we're to be filled with joy, were to be filled with peace. What does that mean? How is that expression to be understood? It is the same word as is used in Ephesians 5:18, where we are told to be filled with the Spirit. Explaining and developing that content, Dr. MacArthur has pointed out, that the term implies that we will be permeated with that hope, and we will be controlled by that hope. We will be permeated with joy. We will be controlled by peace. So in the sense of being permeated with and controlled by, we can be said to be filled with peace, and filled with joy. It comes in and through believing, the text tells us. Luther again tells us to have joy and peace is possible only to him who believes, because joy and peace do not rest upon tangible things, but upon that which lies outside these, and so upon hope. Finally, we need to understand that it is going to result in, Paul uses the expression 'abound in hope'. Actually, it's better understood as super-abounding in hope. We find the same word used in 1 Corinthians 14:12 and in 15:58. The idea is expansively, explosively abounding in hope. That hope is going to lead to action, as we will talk about in a few minutes. Looking back to the text again. Let's bring it to our mind again. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope. Why? or How? By the power of the Holy Spirit. Question that we need

to ask is, how is it? What is going to provide the energy for this to occur? And the answer, of course, is the power of the Holy Spirit. The word that is used there is of course ‘dunamis’. If you have been raised in the church, you understand most likely that that word is the source of our modern term dynamite. It is an explosive energy. And Paul is praying that that will characterize the hope that we as believers have. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that will bring about the answer to Paul's prayer of the reality of hope in the lives of believers.

Now, how is it that that occurs? It occurs through two ways. First of all, through the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3: “All scripture is God breathed, that the man of God may be adequate, complete, lacking nothing and equipped for every good work.” And the MacArthur Study Bible on the passage notes, that so identified is God with His word that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. It is the content of Scripture that most comprehensively, comprehensibly will provide us with hope, in any situation. There's another way that this occurs, and that is through the indwelling of the Spirit. Ephesians 1:13-14 tells us that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as both the assurance or guarantee of our inheritance, and the seal of us we have been marked as legitimate. We have been marked as belonging to God Himself by the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. Earlier in the Scriptures, Paul uses an expression in Colossians 1:27. He refers to the mystery that is now being revealed and he identifies it as follows, he says, “It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Christ in you, the hope of glory. MacArthur Study Bible note tells us, the indwelling Spirit of Christ is the guarantee to each believer of future glory.

At this point, we need to, in a sense, circle back and spend some more time considering, now that we have built that basis. What is the nature or the character of the believers hope? What does that look like? First of all, we need to understand, again, despite it being God's glorious resting place, it leads us to energetic activity. 1 Peter 1:3 describes that hope as a living hope, it is vibrant, it is energetic, acting in the life of a believer, it will leave us astounded at what God works through us. Now, how is it that it is living or energetic? What causes that to occur? First, we have to always keep this in mind. It is based on fact. 1 Corinthians 15:3, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (or Peter), then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.” Turning back to Acts 1:3, we read, “To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” But that's from the NASB. If you were to read the text in the New King James Version, instead of the word ‘convincing proofs’, you would read ‘irrefutable proofs’. In the Greek, the term that is used there, is used once in the entire New Testament. What it means, what it connotes is evidence that will conclusively and completely decide a particular controversy. In modern terminology, we use the expression ‘a smoking gun’. God is saying, and we see this laid out in 1 Corinthians 15, that He has provided many irrefutable proofs. Many, if you will, smoking guns

demonstrating the reality, the certainty of the factuality of Christ's resurrection. Our hope is based on fact.

I've had the privilege twice of visiting Africa. Once approximately 13 years ago. I was able to speak at Uganda Christian University. At that time I met a man who had been a believer under the tyrannical and murderous reign of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. George Casals, he writes, that during that time, one of the favorite songs of the Ugandan church, written by Bill and Gloria Gaither, shortly before this time of brutal persecution began, the title of a song is 'Because he lives I can face tomorrow'. Because He lives I can face tomorrow, because He lives all fear is gone. Our hope is based on the fact that Christ died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

Our hope is reasonable. Despite the fall, despite the impact of the fall on our ability to comprehend, our ability to process, and our ability to receive information. Our hope is based on reason. It is reasonably comprehensible. In Acts 26, Paul is making his defense before King Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus. "And as he was saying these things in his defense", verse 24 tells us, "the Roman governor Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you're out of your mind, your great learning is driving you out of your mind.'" Some of the versions read, "Your great learning is driving you mad. But Paul said to him, No, I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. But I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly, for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice. For this has not been done in a corner." It is reasonable. Paul was not acting unreasonably, when he articulated his defense before Festus and Agrippa. He was speaking true words. He was processing them rationally. And in accordance with the underlying facts concerning what had occurred.

Our hope is explainable. Peter writes, 1 Peter 3, beginning at verse 13, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good, but even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed, and do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled, but sanctify (or set apart) Christ as Lord in your hearts." He goes on to say, "always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet doing so with gentleness and reverence." Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you for a reason or explanation for the hope that is in you. Word there that is used for defense is the term 'apologia'. It is not an apology, as we might tend to understand the word, a statement of grief, a statement of moral regret. It is in fact, an explanation. It is an explanation for the hope that we have. It is a bold explanation, yet is to be done always with reverence for God, reverence for those whom He has placed in authority over us in this life, and with grace, gentleness, speaking the truth so people are able to hear it, to all men. So our hope is to be explainable. Our hope is to be focused and fixed. 1 Peter 1:13: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action. Keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Catch that again, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is fixed, it is focused.

Now, what I'm about to say should not in any way be understood as being an endorsement of tattoos. One close relative of mine, who I will never publicly identify, has a shoulder tattoo. The tattoo is in Greek letters, the word 'elpiso'. The word has been tattooed on the body, as a reminder to her, of the importance of that living hope, in the same manner, in the same way, perhaps even more indelibly, since a tattoo can be burnt off. Our minds should have the living hope, engraved, etched with a diamond stylus, on our comprehension, on our outlook, on every part of our mentality, of our personality, of our interaction with what goes on around us and with those whom we encounter in life.

If I may take you back to the Ugandan church under Idi Amin, one of the great pastors at the time, a man by the name of Kyfos and Ponji, describing the mindset of his church at the beginning of Idi Amin's reign. He writes the following: Together, we determined to make Christ the beginning and the end of all our expectations. Our hope would begin with Him and would end with Him. He goes on to say, we determined to have no hope, except that which was derived from Scripture, no hope, except what we could see promised or stated in the Scriptures. We determined to have no hope except that which was derived from Scripture. Our hope is to be focused and fixed. That hope will lead to action. It will lead to steadfastness during times of persecution, and it will lead to purity. Our hope will lead to action. 1 John 3:2-3, we read, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared, what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope, fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure." That hope, should lead to increasing sanctification within our lives, and increasing commitment to godliness in conduct, godliness in attitude, and godliness in thought.

That being the case, the next aspect of our living hope should come as no surprise. 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul writes, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep (those who have died within the faith), so that you will not grieve in the same manner or as do the rest who have no hope." Our hope governs our grief in response to death, and particularly our own future death, and the death or deaths of other believers. We know that this life is not the end, we know that there will be more, we know that God has promised a better life for those of us who are in Christ, who know Christ. Now, having said that, it should be pointed out that much, and most definitely not all, of the drama that we have seen over the last 14 months, has ultimately been due to the interaction between those who have hope, outside of this life, and those who do not have any such hope. Recently in California, there's been a commercial. It starts off by saying, where is hoped to be found in a world of COVID-19? The Scripture provides that to us, there is the hope for a life after this. There are those who have done everything they can based on science. And this is not to find fault with science properly implemented and properly understood. But a science that in their mind, has no higher authority. It is an existential science, based on the worldview of man, being alone, and without God, supervising and superintending the overall process, but it is a worldview, ultimately, characterized by a lack of hope. In contrast, we as believers have from the beginning had a worldview characterized by hope. And naturally, of course, there have been differences in reaction to what we've experienced in the COVID-19 era. Again, our hope, based on the Word of God governs our grief, governs our view of death.

It should be also pointed out that our hope will increase through perseverance under tribulation. Turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5, starting at verse 3. "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance proven character, and proven character hope. And hope does not disappoint. Because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts, through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Catch that, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit within us. It is the assurance that our hope will not disappoint. But as we go through the process of tribulation, as we go through difficulties, as we go through challenges, even the challenge sometimes of becoming ill with COVID-19. We persevere, and as we do so, that perseverance develops our character. And it also increases the strength, the capacity of our hope. It's like a muscle. The more that we exercise a particular physical muscle, the more it will become strong, the more it will be capable of responding in the future to challenges, the more that our hope is exercised in the same manner, it will increase in its strength, and its capability. And in its challenge, resistance, if you will.

And I'm wrapping this up, what do we do with all of this? I have a personal aversion to ending a sermon with some kind of a gimmicky conclusion. I think we need to look to the text that we have been studying and draw a conclusion from the text. What would the text tell us that we need to take away from this? In this case, I think we can see three things that are called for by the text. First of all, we need to continually increase our knowledge of the character and the attributes of God. This comes from study. Don't hesitate to tackle challenging books that will expand your mind on the character of God. It also comes from experience, don't shy away from going through difficult, challenging times in which you ponder and see lived out the reality of the character of God. Secondly, and we've talked about this before, we need to focus and fix our hope, and our expectations. Are our expectations governed by are they controlled by the Word of God? Do they focus on Christ and on His impending return? If not, we need to sharpen the focus. We need to fix the content of our hope. Finally, as the nature of this verse is, in and of itself, a prayer, the expression of a heart's desire. Probably the most important thing we need to do, is to diligently pray that God Himself will work and instill this hope in our lives.

So let's close in prayer. Even now, Father in heaven, I thank you for your Word, for the encouragement, the comfort and the hope that it provides. If I may, along with Paul, I would pray that that hope would characterize the lives of each believer in Chilliwack. That hope would fill them with delight, a delight in what you are doing, a delight in who you are, a sense of peace, comfort that you are in complete, sovereign control. That they would do so while continually believing that what you have said you will accomplish, and that they along with all of us who take the name of Christ, will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lord, I pray that your hand of blessing would rest upon each individual in this church even now, until we meet again, may the grace of God bless each of them. Amen.