

The Firm Foundation We Stand On

Dear Friend,

I am a glass half full kind of guy. So, when my wife was pregnant with my daughter, each day started with a full dose of hope. Today could be THE day. As the pregnancy wore on, my wife's discomfort increased while my hope slowly turned into frustration. After many days of waiting with eager expectation, I became impatient. I wanted to see my baby girl. I'm sure my wife felt this deep desire on greater levels than me. There was joy and impatience and discomfort and frustration and excitement and pain all wrapped into several weeks leading up to Abby's birth. Early one morning, Irene began to have some severe contractions. I thought, "This is it! We are finally going to greet Abby!" 5 hours later, they died down and stopped completely. I felt like my heart was crushed. We got a letter in the mail requiring Irene to travel to St. Louis for her immigration. She had just had some severe contractions and we prepared for this trip as though Abby may come along the way. Thankfully, Abby waited one more week, but I can remember the hope and expectation of that week. The hope Christians possess in Jesus Christ should powerfully overcome the suffering experienced on earth.

One of the great lies proclaimed regularly in the United States today is this: the point of life is to enjoy pleasure and avoid pain at all costs. According to this lie, life consists of personal control. The worst part is, some pastors cherry pick verses in the Bible to support this theme, because our culture loves it. They package the Bible into neat, comfortable pills to swallow that pacify the Church. The result is a weak and ineffective Church. Sin and suffering are very real forces impacting us all. The Bible offers real hope to Christians suffering in the world today. When we understand what the Word of God has to say about hope and suffering, when we believe the gospel as our saving hope, then we are uniquely equipped to respond to suffering in a godly way. Today we are going to talk about our saving hope and how it should strengthen and encourage us when we suffer.

Paul was a very religious man. He knew the Word of God very well and he set his hope of salvation on following the law to the letter. Paul didn't just follow the law. He also believed and obeyed many strict human traditions that had been passed from generation to generation. When Jesus came to earth, preaching the

Good News about himself, Paul was one of the greatest opponents of Jesus. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit fell on his disciples. At the same time, Paul persecuted Jesus' followers very severely. He beat them, threw them in prison and confiscated their things. This is why it is so surprising when this same man wrote these words to a church in Ephesus, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 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. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. 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.” Romans 5:1-5 NIV**

Clearly something drastic had changed in Paul's heart. These are not the words of a man who hates Jesus and wants to persecute his followers. Paul's hope is no longer based on his own ability to follow the law. Instead, his life is built on a foundation of hope in Jesus.

In this passage, hope is described in two different ways. Paul says, **“We boast in the hope of the glory of God.”** Here God's glory is referring to the blessed appearance of Jesus coming again. God's glory is complete when Jesus returns and Christians are confidently assured that he will come soon. This hope is future oriented, looking forward to the day believers are reunited physically with Jesus their Savior. Hope is also described as the result of a progression of actions. Paul bluntly states that Christians will suffer. We can glorify God when we suffer because we know God is building our perseverance, perseverance builds godly character and godly character develops hope. This kind of hope is the day to day renewal of God's love and strength poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It helps Christians live out their faith through the suffering and sin around them. Biblical hope produces joy for the future reuniting with Christ and endurance to live faithfully day by day.

This concept of hope can seem hard to grasp sometimes, especially when we are experiencing horrible pain, suffering or persecution. How can a good God allow His people to suffer on earth? Why doesn't God just wipe out all pain, sin

and death? Jesus Christ's own disciples struggled with these questions. Using the analogy of expectation during pregnancy, Jesus explains the relationship between pain and hope in the life of believers. Jesus says, **“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”** John 16:21-24 NIV Just as a mother struggles through the suffering of childbirth, so the Christian patiently waits for Christ's return. The disciples experienced incredible pain when Jesus died on the cross. They were confused, scared and suffering from their loss. Jesus promised that their pain would be completely forgotten compared to the joy of seeing him resurrected. The same promise is for Christians today.

Christ-like hope gives believers confidence in prayer. The disciples didn't pray to God the Father in Jesus' name because he was physically with them. Once Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples experienced the hope that God would answer all their requests made in Jesus' name. Christians have confidence that all their prayers will be answered when they hope in the work of Jesus Christ. This is an incredible comfort for suffering Believers today. Hope is confidence in Christ's character and work on the cross. This hope fuels Christians to do good deeds under incredible amounts of persecution, suffering and pain.

Song: All My Hope By Crowder Ft Tauren Wells

The Israelite nation rebelled against God many times throughout the Old Testament. God pursued His people by sending many judges, prophets and kings to try to lead them back to Him. Eventually, God allowed His people to be beaten and taken by their enemies. For 70 years they experienced exile and humiliation from their rulers. In Ezekiel 36:34-37, God gives hope to His people by saying, **“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your**

idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” Ezekiel 36:24-27 NIV God doesn't just promise to bring the Israelites back to their land. He promises to give them a new heart and new spirit.

Sin causes the brokenness we see in the world. Sin within ourselves causes a hard heart. Sin against others ruins relationships and tears apart communities. Sin caused by a Fallen world brings untimely and seemingly meaningless death every day. What does hope have to combat sin? God gives hope to His children that He will cleanse our sins, give us a new heart and put His Holy Spirit in us. Jesus Christ cleansed our sins once and for all on the cross. He justified us by his righteousness and our faith in him is our hope. The Christian life is one of progressively growing into the image of Christ. This is the new heart of flesh that God gives us. We don't do this work alone, instead the Holy Spirit convicts, corrects and guides us on this life long journey. Hope is what keeps Christians faithful, humble and ready to respond to sin correctly. Hope encourages the Christian that this life is not all there is and that life with Christ will be infinitely better than suffering on earth. Hope leads Christians to respond in all circumstances with joy and contentment.

We find joy and contentment in the hope of eternal life. David says it best in Psalm 84, **“How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young— a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you.”** **Psalms 84:1-4,10-12 NIV** When we set our hope on eternal life with God, we yearn for Him in the appropriate way. We cry out for God to come sooner. This hope shapes how we make our daily decisions now.

Too often professing Christians go throughout life without any joy. Maybe when they first declared they believed in Jesus, they were on fire for serving him. Over time, the world sucked all joy out of the young believer's heart. Trials, hardships and suffering make it difficult for new converts to find hope in eternal life. They have their eyes and heart set on the present difficulties, not the future glories they can expect. This worldview radically distorts the joy that comes from hope in Christ. The opposite is true as well, when our worldview is shaped by hope in Christ, there is no amount of suffering that can steal our joy. Hope is considering our home in heaven not the pain we experience here. It is pointing others to Christ's work in our lives and sharing the joy we have in Christ. Hope sucks all power out of anxiety, fear and depression when it is built on a sure foundation of faith in Christ. What we hope for directly impacts how we view ourselves and others.

Faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior comes with a glorious hope. This hope shapes the way we live by encouraging us to look forward to the future glory of Christ's return. This hope strengthens Christians under incredible pain and suffering by giving God glory in times of greatest need. This hope gives Christians confidence in Jesus to pray for what they want and need. All prayers will be answered by God the Father on behalf of the Son. This hope encourages believers to grow in holiness and Christ-likeness through the power of the Holy Spirit and communion with Jesus. This hope reminds us of the future glory we will experience in heaven, when all pain, sorrow and death will be defeated. Truly, better is one day in the courts of the Lord than a thousand elsewhere!

I hope this message encourages you to put your hope in Jesus. He alone can turn your sorrow into Joy. Lean on him, his sacrifice, his love and his strength while you hope. Truly, God is faithful. He will complete the work He began in you through Christ by the Holy Spirit. Amen

Yours In Christ,

Chris Aaron Rice

