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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: The God of Hope

Transcribed Message
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Romans 15:13

I am told that wilderness guides have a saying called the rule of three. The rule of three says that you can go three weeks without food, you can go basically three days without water, and you can go about three minutes without air. My question is if that's the last thing your guide is saying to you before you go wherever you're going, why are you going? Somebody has added a fourth one to the rule of three and has said sure, we know we can basically get by without food for three weeks. We can make it three days without water, and we can go three minutes without air and oxygen. But we can only go three seconds without hope. Sadly, you know a lot of people feel that sense of hopelessness. In fact, just in the United States last year in 2023 over 50,000 people reached such a state of hopelessness that they ended their own life. That is just a reality of the world that we live in. It reminds me of what Paul said in Ephesians 2:12 when he said there was a time when you were far off from God. You were distant from Him. You were without God, and you were without hope in this world. But now you have been brought near by the blood of Christ. That's where we stand as followers of Christ this morning. There was a time when we were far off. We were without God, and we were without hope. But now because of what Christ has done for us we are brought near and we get to recognize that wonderful truth.

This morning in Romans 15:13 we are living on the promises of God and the hope of God that fills us with joy and with peace. A very quick clarify and review. If you were with us last week, you'll understand. If you weren't with us this last week, stay with us for just a few minutes because we want to begin with a word of clarification. The first one is where you sit. I just want to say and remind you I don't really care where you sit. I just want you to be a welcoming person at Covenant wherever you're sitting. I want you to feel free to not claim that seat that you're sitting in with too much enthusiasm and

cause somebody else to think that they might be taking your place. There were some good fun comments this last week. Here's an email I received from a guy. he said, "Dear Carlon, I'm not one of those people who have a preferred seat in the auditorium and then judges anyone I find already sitting there when I come in. my wife and I will sit anywhere we find a couple of empty spaces. But would you please have a talk with a guy that keeps parking in my parking space?" so this is the joy of pastoring. You open one problem and then another one arises as well.

Regarding the Syrophoenician woman. The Syrophoenician woman. The problem of that passage it seems to me is that she presented herself as a Jew. A few of you wondered a little bit more about that. I think when she came she was trying to lay claim to being within the line of promise, referencing Jesus as her Messiah as Lord God son of David. That's why Jesus never answered her. That's why he didn't respond to her initially. When she came to understand her rightful place as a Gentile – she's a Syrophoenician, not a Jew – then Jesus moves towards her in great compassion and remarks about her amazing faith because she did in fact say oh yes, I know I'm not Jewish and I know I am not in the line of promise, but I know there's still blessing. of course, Jesus recognized that.

Then the third thing just kind of flows out from that and that is simply the matter of promises. We Gentiles have no promises of our own. When I said that I want to be clear. I didn't say we don't have any promises. I said we don't have any promises of our own. We have promises and they're ours. We own them but we don't have them on our own as Gentiles. That was Paul's point in Romans 11, wasn't it? This olive tree which represents the nation of Israel and God's people and all of the promises from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and on down through the lineage that brought us our Savior, all of those came because of and through the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. As Gentiles, just like the Syrophoenician woman, we don't lay claim to promises that God made to the nation of Israel and to the Jewish people, but there is a place of blessing and there are many promises that are truly ours in every sense of the word because we're grafted in, as Paul explains in Romans 11.

In this section, we're really doing a review of what it is that Paul has spoken to. The theme in this last major section as we commented on is all about unity. 35 verses

Paul is talking to them about unity. It must be very important to him. The means to that unity is that we are to welcome one another. He starts off in chapter 14 verse 1 and says welcome each other. He gets to the end of that section in chapter 15 verse 7 and he says welcome each other. Having a welcoming spirit and a welcoming heart and an open heart and an open spirit to each other – that goes a long way to breaking down the very things that Paul's been dealing with in this matter of unity.

Then finally verse 13 fits nicely as really an ending. Observations have been made by more than a few people that verse 13 of this 15th chapter could in fact be the final verse of Romans. It is such a great verse, and it brings everything together so beautifully. If Paul had just stopped at verse 13, we would just be still amazed at all that we have learned and seen in this book. We know the Holy Spirit didn't intend for Paul to stop at verse 13. He had him go on in verse 14 and then following in chapter 16 to give us many personal comments. We'll get into seeing some of those, Lord willing, in the weeks to come. But this is the first of three benedictions. There's this benediction in 15:13. There is a benediction in 15:33 and there's a benediction in 16:20. They all kind of are the heart of Paul for God's people and for the people of Rome.

Let's look at all you need. Verse 13 again brings this to us. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." The first thing I want you to notice is this is another of Paul's prayers. This is another of Paul's prayers. He breaks out into prayer in this 13th verse for the believers there in Rome. It is simply another indication of the heart of Paul of his burden. It's the prayer of Paul and it's the burden of this man's heart for these people. That's what he's doing here. He's praying for them. This is his concern for the believers of the church at Rome. Paul is not primarily an apologist. You can read through the book of Romans and see this through the eyes of an apologist. He certainly is not an antagonist, even though he's laying out his arguments very precisely, very concisely, very logically. His heart isn't necessarily just to be an apologist. It isn't, I don't think, simply to be an antagonist. It really is the heart of the pastor for his people. That is what he's showing us here. His deep emotion and concern his love for these believers.

When he comes to the end of this section in 15:12, he didn't say well that should care of that. I've shown them. This is what they need to be doing. I wrapped it up and I

brought it together and logically made my presentation. Of course not. That is not his heart at all. In fact, what he does after he lays out all of this, he breaks out into this prayer. He wants to pray for them as their pastor in that sense.

Now I think secondly, whenever we see something like this, it is just another reminder of our need. It is just another reminder of our need. Just as it was for them, so it is for us. This is what prayer does in our life. prayer reminds us of the depth of our need. If we're not praying, then we pretty much think we've got it. What is an indication of prayerlessness in our life? an indication of prayerlessness is God, I've got this. I can handle this. We all know what that looks like. We all know what that feels like because when we do come up against something that we feel like we need God's help with, then we're praying. Whether it's in the 1st century or whether it's in the 21st century, there are simply things that God needs to be doing on our behalf. One of those things clearly is our need for hope. Our need for joy and our need for peace. We need it. Paul's going to remind us that we can't produce it on our own. Things we have to do, but we can't produce on our own.

Let's look at a growing faith. A growing faith. I read a blog this week that was written by a pastor and the title was "The Single Most Encouraging Thing for a Pastor." He was just reflecting on his ministry and what encouraged him. He started off by saying you might think these things encourage me and, on some level, maybe they do, but these aren't the things that grip my soul. He listed off things like a growing church with many numbers of people and all that that looks like and all that that means. Certainly, that's a blessing in many ways. But he said that's not what drives me. That's not what I'm looking for. It is not that people are just coming, the lowest bar. It's not the loudness of singing and the participation in that way. He just kept going through some of these things that might practically come to mind. He finally just says this is what it is. This is the most encouraging thing. This is why I went into the ministry. I don't know any pastor who wouldn't agree with him when he said it was to see life change happening in people. It was to see people growing in their understanding of God's word, understanding the claims of Christ on their life, understanding maybe the gospel for the first time of course, coming into the faith, but then growing in the faith. That's God's intent for every one of us. You can't possibly read the New Testament and not go away

thinking that I'm not supposed to stay in spiritual infancy. There's something very wrong if I'm the same person in 2024 that I was in 2023 and on back it goes.

I see that here in the heart of Paul. It simply is this matter of growing in our faith. This is of vital importance here in this particular verse because look what he says in this 13th verse. I just want you to notice the very first thing is everything begins with God. Everything starts with God. I don't know how you read the book of Romans and not conclude that our God is the initiator, that our God is not the seeker, that our God is not the pursuer. You're reading with a different set of glasses or maybe with no glasses at all if that's how you read the book of Romans. When you read Romans, if there's anything that's clear, it's that God is the initiator. God is the pursuer. God is the seeker. God is the lover. He's the one who has come after you and drawn you to him. That's the very first thing that you see here in this 13th verse. It begins with God, and it ends with God.

I just throw in this point. Our God is Trinitarian. Our God is a Trinitarian God. Paul's praying to the Father. He is the God of hope. He ends this verse rather by asking the Holy Spirit to apply this truth to life. you have the Holy Spirit being asked to work in the lives of God's people. Of course, we know even though it is not mentioned here specifically in this verse, but we know that all of the blessings of God come to us through and are mediated by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a Trinitarian people. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are all engaged in this process of growing our faith.

Paul, as he comes in prayer, comes to a Trinitarian God and he begins right away by saying our God is both the source of hope and he is the object of hope. He is the source of hope and the object of hope. When he prays, "May the God of hope ..."

We can understand that in two different ways. He is the source of hope and he is also the object of hope. That is our God. Back in verse 5, remember when he prayed there he prayed to the God of endurance and encouragement. He wanted God to bring endurance and encouragement into our life. We were all in agreement. If there's anything we need on a regular basis, we need endurance. We need perseverance. We need encouragement. That's who our God is.

So now here the emphasis is on God as the source of our hope. The source of hope. In the benediction in 15:33 and in 16:20, he's going to talk about the God of peace. God is the source of peace. Here you have the sense that in a person's life that is sensing hopelessness, and at any given time that could be any of us. We have all been at points in our life where we felt very much a sense of hopelessness. I have no doubt that there is somebody sitting here this morning. There may be multiple people sitting here this morning feeling a sense of hopelessness. The very first thing Paul does in praying for the people and the believers at Rome is to appeal to this God who is the source of hope. The God of hope. That's who we turn to.

Why is that? It is because of what hope is. It is a confident and a certain expectation in God. Biblical hope is not some uncertain, indefinite feeling about the future. That's the farthest thing from hope. Biblical hope is a confident and a certain expectation in God. It's not wishful thinking. It is not crossing your fingers. It is not wishing somebody good luck for the future. It's not knocking on wood. It's not any of those things. Our God is the source of hope, and our hope is in his character. It is in his faithfulness. It's in his track record. Hope takes us to the future but this hope rests on the faithfulness, character, and word of God that has been put on display before us for all our lives.

Secondly, we know what this is. We know what this certain and confident expectation is. It is that our God will never disappoint. Our God will never disappoint. It doesn't mean we're never disappointed with God. Philip Yancey has written a wonderful book, *Disappointed with God*, and he basically goes through starting in the Old Testament showing how it is that God's people at various points often having significant and profound disappointment with God. Why? Because they didn't know what God was doing. They didn't understand what God was doing. Sometimes God doesn't tell us what he is doing. Other times he has told us, but we're not listening. We're not paying attention. We're not mindful of what it is that he's doing. Yancy makes it clear that sometimes there is that sense of disappointment with God and it is often because we don't fully grasp and understand what God is doing.

Listen to what the psalmist says. Psalm 42 verse 5 "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him,

my Savior and my God.” Or Lamentations 3. We know 22 and 23 well but look in the first part of that verse 21: “But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.” What God has promised he is going to do. Someone has rightly said the most important sermon we can preach to ourselves every day is this matter of putting your certain, confident hope in God. Preach that to yourself every day. Preach to yourself every day based on the faithfulness of our God. You put faith, your trust, your focus on him. Get your eyes off your circumstances. Get your eyes off other people. Get your eyes off yourself. What is it that distracts us and causes us not to walk in this confident certainty of our faithful God? It is because I take my eyes off him and I have them on my circumstances, which I don't understand. Or I have them on somebody else who has greatly disappointed me or hurt me. Or I have them on myself and my world gets smaller and smaller as it shrinks in around myself. This confident, certain expectation and hope is because we are mindful that our God is a God of hope.

Now look where Paul goes next. He goes next to joy and peace that comes from trusting. Joy and peace that comes from trusting. Our focus is on the God of hope. This confident expectation regarding what is to come. Flowing out from that confident expectation and certainty that God is going to be faithful to his word and to himself. Paul says coming from that then there is this sense of joy and peace. Let's look at these two ideas. What do we need to know about joy? Paul says flowing out from this God who is the source of hope, when we're anchored on him, when we're focused on him, when our eyes are off our circumstances and off others and off ourselves and they're firmly fixed on this faithful God, what happens? There is a source of joy.

The first thing we know is that Paul is the apostle of joy. Paul is the apostle of joy. It is pretty amazing. He uses the word joy 21 times in his letters. The next closest New Testament writer is John and he uses it 9 times. 21 times Paul is talking about this matter of joy. Paul is the one who told us in 1 Thessalonians 5: rejoice always. One verse. Two words. Rejoice always. He's the one who wrote a whole book about joy ... called Philippians ... from prison! This man knows something about what it is to have a

certain expectation and hope in a faithful God because he zeroed in on the character of that God. From that he has become the apostle of joy.

We know that Jesus is one who spoke often of joy. In John 10 Jesus said I've come that they might have life. He's talking about us, that we would have life and that we would have an abundant life A joyful life. The same thing in John chapter 15 and verse 11. I have come that your joy may be full. In John 16 in his high priestly prayer, Jesus acknowledges and says to us in this world you're going to have trouble. Anybody agree with that? In this world you're going to have trouble. But he also said don't despair. Don't give up. Don't lose hope because I've overcome the world. The joy that Paul prays for is the joy that Jesus himself exemplified. John 16:24. Ask and you will receive your joy may be full.

Joy is also thirdly a fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace. Peace is also a fruit of the spirit. Joy is not related to our circumstances. Joy is not related to our circumstances. Listen to the Scriptures. Earlier in Romans Paul wrote about this matter, chapter 5 verse 3. "Not only that but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces 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." Or Philippians chapter 4: "Not that I'm speaking of being in need for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." The joy that Paul prays for is a deep, durable delight in God. What is joy? Joy is a deep durable delight in God. That's what it is. That's what he's asking God to give us. That's what he is praying for. This God that we trust in, this God who is faithful, he wants us to have a deep and durable delight in him. The God who is the source of hope from our focus on him flows into our life this deep, durable delight, this joy.

Then he goes on to say, but it also brings us a peace. What we need to know about peace. When the Bible speaks of peace there are two kinds of peace. There's peace with God and there's the peace of God. There is an objective peace and there's a subjective peace. The peace that is objective in nature, the peace that we have with

God is what is talked about in Romans 5:1. "Therefore, having been justified by faith I have peace with God." As he described in that Ephesians 2:12 passage, I'm no longer without God and without hope in this world. I'm no longer the enemy of God, as he says in Ephesians 5:8. I'm no longer at enmity with God. Imagine that! That time when we had no regard for God or for his ways or his purposes. We were literally enemies of God and that's when he of course moved towards us. What Jesus did for us is he made it possible for us to have peace with God. There is that kind of peace. That's not what he's asking about here.

He's talking here about a personal peace. He's talking here about an inward, subjective peace. This is the peace that God gives to us, this heart of rest, this mind of rest. Philippians 4. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And what happens? The peace of God which passes understanding is going to guard your heart and your mind. That's what it does. The peace of God that flows into our life, along with this joy from the God of all hope, wants us to experience this deep, abiding delight in who he is. As he does that, he fills our hearts and our minds with a sense of peace. It is His word that is guarding us and guiding us, isn't it? That's what he's talking about here when he speaks to this peace.

Notice how this joy and this peace come about. This is the outworking of trust. It flows out of our faith and our trust in God. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. In believing. There is the part, right? In believing. We could easily translate that as you believe or because you believe. He's connecting believing and trusting with this sense of delight and joy in our God. It is our believing that God is faithful to himself and to his word. He connects joy and peace. Do you want joy and peace? Of course you do. I do. It flows out from the God of hope. But what it requires of us is that we trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him, knowing that he will direct our paths. That flows out from this sense of trust. If we're not trusting, if we're not believing, there is no way we can experience this joy and peace. You want joy and you want peace. It requires that we trust. It requires that we step in by faith to believing and taking God at his word.

What does that look like in practical terms? Let me just suggest three things. First, what Paul has already told us in Romans. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. We grow in faith. We overcome doubt and despair when we read the word. When we ask the Holy Spirit of God to open our hearts, to give us understanding, to give us a sense of rest and joy and peace in the word that we're reading. That's the value, my friend. I'm not saying read a verse today and drive the devil away. This isn't some gimmick. This is the reality of who we are as the people of God, investing our time and our energy in the word of God, in the reading of his word, and the studying of his word. Every time we open it, our prayer is to the God of all hope: Fill me with your joy and your peace. Your words settle into and wash over my heart and my mind and guard my soul. In this world you will have trouble. We all know it. We all live and experience it every day. But God is the one who has promised to do something about that.

Remember back in the 4th verse of the 15th chapter: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and to the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Remember the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their hearts are despairing. They think that the whole thing is falling apart, that Jesus wasn't who he said he was. It literally said that they were despairing, without hope. Jesus comes alongside and Luke said that he opened to them the Scriptures and he showed them from the Old Testament all the things concerning himself. What did they say? When their eyes were opened, they said did not our hearts burn within us when he spoke to us and showed us all of these things out of the Scriptures! That's it, my friends.

I read an amazing story this week. Most of you know the name of Joni Eareckson Tada and know her story. She was just a teenager when she dove into a lake and didn't realize the shallowness or that there was a rock there. She was paralyzed for the rest of her life from her neck down. 50 years. This article is about her 50-year journey. It is a remarkable story as you know about how God has used her in the midst of just the unimaginable. This is what she said. If you know anything about her, you know the depth to this woman's life is unlike what we see. She is extraordinary. This is what she said: "Early on in my paralysis and almost by accident, I unearthed an unexpected

treasure. I opened the word of God and discovered a mineshaft. I dug my paralyzed fingers into a weight of incomprehensible glory, a sweetness that Jesus made my paralysis pale in comparison. In my great joy I went out and sold everything, trading in my resentment, my self-pity to buy the ugly field nobody else would want and I struck gold. After decades of using the pick and shovel of prayer and scripture, my field has yielded the riches of the kingdom of heaven. I have found the God who is thunderous, full-throttled joy spilling over. His Son swims in his own bottomless ocean of elation and he is positively absolutely driven to share it with us. Why? As he puts it, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. Jesus is after nothing less than our full joy. But deep in the bedrock of scripture, my shovel hit something hard and unyielding. God is nobody's water boy. As the solemn monarch of everything and everyone, he shares his joy on his own terms and those terms call for us to suffer and to suffer in some measure as his beloved Son did when he walked on the earth." It reminded me of the writer of Hebrews that spoke of Jesus and said who for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and despised the shame. Unimaginable. Yet she takes us right to the point of great need, that we would get the word of God into our life.

That brings to us this durable delight and joy in God when we see and he reveals himself to us on a daily basis. Memorizing Scripture. This is the second practical thing. It takes every thought captive and brings it into obedience to Christ, doesn't it? I am caused to see the wonder and the glory of God in the memorizing of his words. So many, many promises with regard to hope, with regard to joy, with regard to peace. Let them wash over your anxious heart. Let them speak to you in those sleepless nights when the cares of this world want to overtake you. let them become that guard over your soul. That's what God wants to do with his word.

Of course, praying is what Paul does right here. Praying for what I need. There is the word that is read and is memorized. He's praying. Another thing that I thought of was just listening to and singing back to God these wonderful songs that we learn in here every Sunday. Just let those repetitious words come back over and over and remind you of the faithfulness of God in our lives.

Lastly the realization of it all. The realization of it all. It leads to an even more abundant hope. As Paul prays this prayer, he says he wants it to abound. He wants this

joy and this peace and this hope to abound even more. It's the same word that John uses in 10:10 when he speaks of Jesus saying I have come that you might have life and you might have it abundantly. The word "abundantly" is the word "abound". Jesus wants this for us. Look at all the words in the 13th verse. Fill. All. Abound. This is God's heart for us. Our God is not a miser. He is a super generous God. It takes me to Psalm 16:11 – "You make known to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." We look at those things and we see what it is that Paul is praying and we see in a sense some of the things that we are called on to do.

But then we also notice as he closes this verse that there is a divine means to bring all of this about and that means is the Holy Spirit. He says, "so that". Now may the God of peace and the God of hope, the God who is the source of hope, may he fill you with joy and peace in believing so that. So that. Here it is. By the Holy Spirit. There is no hope in God apart from the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our life. Just look at this verse again and you see it begins with God and it ends with God. He starts by praying to God the Father. He ends by calling for the Holy Spirit to do in our life but only he can do. It is John 15:15. Without me, Jesus said, you can do nothing.

Maybe this morning you relate right now to that wonderful story, that wonderful encounter that Jesus had with that father who longed to have his son who was oppressed by demonic influence freed from that. He said to Jesus those wonderful words, "Lord, I believe! Help me in my unbelief!" That's a prayer that we probably should be praying often. It's a prayer that God loves to answer. Lord, I believe! Help me in my unbelief.

What do we take away? In a hopeless world, we have the opportunity to point people to the God who is our living hope, to tell people that hope has a name and that name is Jesus. Hope is found in what Christ has done on our behalf. Once we were separated from God. Once we were without God and without hope in this world. But now we have been brought near by the blood of Christ. It is this gospel, this good news that brings this hope, this joy, this peace into our lives. It is our desire and our heart that everybody here understands, knows, and experiences that for themselves. That is God's offer to you through the gospel.

The gospel which is good news but starts off with some bad news. The bad news is that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The bad news is that sin always brings death and separation. The good news is that God in Christ has done something for us that we couldn't do for ourselves. He came and he lived a perfect life. He died a terrible death, and he did it for you, and he did it for me. If we put our faith and our trust in what Jesus did and what Jesus did alone, not in what we can add to it, not our efforts, not our good works, but only in what Jesus did on the cross, then God gives to us the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, we're so thankful this morning for the prayer of the apostle Paul that is so appropriate and so needed for us today as well. Father, this reminder as we cry out to you ourselves that you as the God of hope would fill us with joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us we can abound in this hope. Father, I pray that your Holy Spirit would encourage your people in the truth of your word. I pray that your Holy Spirit would open any heart, any mind this morning to understand that this relationship that you desire to have with us is available to us through what Jesus did. I pray that your Spirit would give clarity, understanding, and a spirit of belief to anyone who is hearing this this morning and has not trusted Jesus as their Savior. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.