

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 21, 2016**

**THE BENEFITS OF GRACE:  
REJOICING IN HOPE**

**Romans 5:1-5**

We looked last Sunday at the first two benefits of grace highlighted by the apostle Paul in the opening verses of Romans 5: *peace with God* and the privilege of *unrestricted access to God's grace*, which is available to us at any and every moment for any and every need in any and every situation.

Today we consider the third benefit of God's grace to us, which is "the hope of the glory of God" (5:2b), which is a source of great joy and confidence in the life of a Christian.

God's Word comes to us once again today from Romans 5:15. Let us give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's holy Word.

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"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (5:2b).

The dictionary defines hope as "the feeling of wanting something to happen or to be true, and thinking that it could happen or be true" (merriam-webster.com). Hope is "a feeling of desire for something and [a reasonable] confidence in the possibility of its fulfillment" (World English Dictionary). Let me give you an example or two: "If you were there, I hope you enjoyed the Chili Cook-Off and the presentation by Pastor David last night on his recent trip to Ghana." Or: "I hope you will make every effort to be at church every Sunday from now to Easter."

Sometimes, though, when we use the word hope, it is really more like wishful thinking than anything else. Or maybe it is a way of expressing a desire whose fulfillment is uncertain at best. Such as:

- I sure hope we don't get any more snow this winter. Or, conversely: I hope we have another big snow storm this week and have two days off from school.
- For you hockey fans: I really hope this is the year the Capitals finally win the Stanley Cup.
- I hope (insert name of your choice) becomes the next President of the United States. Or: I hope (insert name of your choice) does *not* become President of the United States. Ever.
- I hope I get a classic Ford Thunderbird for my birthday. (That is definitely wishful thinking.)

You get the idea. But this is not what Paul has in mind when he talks about hope. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking. It is, in Chuck Swindoll's words, "an assured expectation"

(Swindoll, *Insights on Romans*, 112). To rejoice in hope is to live “with joyful confidence” in God (Swindoll, 112), in the trustworthiness of His promises and the sufficiency of His grace. In the words of John Stott: “Christian hope is not uncertain, like ordinary everyday hopes about the weather or our health; it is a joyful and confident expectation which rests on the promises of God” (Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 140). The Revell Bible Dictionary defines it as “an eager, confident expectation that sustains a person while he/she waits patiently for future fulfillment” (RBD, 494).

Do you want to know how important hope is? Dr. Jerome Groopman, a physician and professor at Harvard Medical School, wrote a book called *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness* (2004). In his work with patients with serious illnesses, he discovered that they are all looking for a sense of genuine hope, and that hope is as important to the patient as anything he might prescribe as a physician. That says something about the value of hope. Groopman defines hope as “the ability to see a path to the future. You are facing dire circumstances,” he says, “and you need to know everything that is blocking or threatening you. And then you see a path, or a potential path, to get where you want to be. Once you see that, there is a tremendous emotional uplift that occurs” ([www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com), “Doctor Describes the Healing Power of Hope”).

One theologian (Emil Brunner) said that “what oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of life.” That, too, says something about the importance and necessity of hope. Not just for Christians but for everyone.

Not surprisingly, the Bible has a lot to say about hope. The word *hope* occurs 166 times in the Bible (NIV), including 18 times in Job, 31 times in the Psalms, 11 times in Proverbs, and 17 times here in Romans. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah called on God as the “Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress” (Jeremiah 14:8). David praised God as “the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas” (Psalm 65:5). In Romans 15:13, Paul refers to the Lord as “the God of hope,” and asks Him to fill the Christians in Rome (and, by extension, us) “with all joy and peace as (we) trust in Him, so that (we) may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Overflow with hope in the God of hope! Doesn’t that sound good? Lord, let it be so!

In Lamentations 3, following the fall of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, Jeremiah expresses the grief and sorrow in his soul over the suffering and loss and affliction of his people. But then, in the middle of his lament, he says:

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:  
Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,  
for His compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
great is Your faithfulness.  
The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him,  
to those who seek Him.  
(Lamentations 3:21-23, 25)

Isaiah says that though “youths grow tired and weary” (which seems to be true especially when you ask your kids to do something that involves labor), and “young men stumble and fall, those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:30-31). Those who put their hope in Him – those whose hope is grounded securely in God – find that “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (40:29).

David is so bold as to say in Psalm 25 that “no one whose hope is in (the Lord) will ever be put to shame” (25:3), which is true because of the trustworthiness, the unfailing love, the sovereign grace and mercy of God our Savior. In Isaiah 49:23, the Lord Himself says: “Those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

Does this mean that you and I will never experience disappointment in this life? No. Does it mean that we are exempt from the ordinary difficulties of life? No. Does it mean that we will never encounter obstacles or opposition or criticism, or suffer setbacks in the course of life? No.

What it means is that if we put our hope in God, if we take God at His word and trust Him to keep His word and do what He has promised, we will not be disappointed in the outcome. We will be blessed. Beyond our wildest imagination. When we get to heaven and see God face to face in the fullness of His glory, I think we will be in for some surprises – happy surprises – that are just way beyond anything our little minds can conceive. Even though we must go through hardships of different kinds in this life, no one whose hope is in God, no one who has experienced the indwelling presence and power of God the Holy Spirit for Christian life and service, will be disappointed when we see how it all turns out in the end. In fact, far from being disappointed, I think we will be so overwhelmed with joy in our hearts and gratitude to God that we will find ourselves, in the words of Charles Wesley, “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

You see, the object of our hope is “the glory of God” – which John Stott describes as “His radiant splendor to be fully displayed in the end. Already His glory is revealed in creation and in Christ the Son. One day the curtain will be raised and the glory of God will be fully disclosed” (Stott, 140).

The word *glory*, as it relates to God, has to do with the manifestation of God’s being and greatness. The Hebrew word *chabod* carries the sense of the weightiness or heaviness of God’s inherent majesty and magnificence. The New Testament word *doxa*, from which we get the word “doxology”, refers to the splendor or preeminence of God, which properly results in giving Him the praise and honor He deserves as our Sovereign God and Savior.

We can only imagine – only *begin* to imagine – what it will be like when we see God face to face in His full, unfiltered glory, and when the Lord returns and makes everything right everywhere in creation. We can only imagine. But we live in hope. We wait in hope. Because hope involves waiting. By the grace and power of God we live in this joyful confidence – this assured expectation, this sure and certain knowledge – that God’s glory *will* be fully revealed.

You see, evil will not have the last word. ISIS will not have the last word. Al-Qaeda will not have the last word. The Taliban will not have the last word. Islam will not have the last word. Iran will not have the last word. Russia will not have the last word. Nor will China or any other nation have the last word. Not even the United States of America. Secularism and atheism will not have the last word. Neither will Republicans or Democrats, conservatives or liberals, libertarians or progressives or socialists. The Supreme Court will not have the last word, because it is not the ultimate *Supreme* Court. The President of the United States will not have the last word, whomever he or she may be. Congress will not have the last word. Death will not have the last word. Suffering and pain will not have the last word. Cancer will not have the last word. Nor will the cancer of racial prejudice.

Jesus will have the last word. He will. When He comes again, we will see Him in the fullness of His glory and power and majesty. And every knee will bow before Him, willingly or otherwise, and every tongue will acknowledge that He is Lord, to the glory and praise of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

The hope that this is what will happen is not wishful thinking. It is not like hoping Abraham Lincoln was the first President of the United States, because that is the answer you put on your history test. This hope that empowers us to live with joyful confidence is something you can count on, because the source of our hope is God Himself, who has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.

In his Gospel, Matthew points to Jesus and says that “in His name the nations will put their hope” (Matthew 12:21), fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the messianic “servant of the Lord” (Isaiah 42:1-4). Paul gives this testimony in 1 Timothy 4:9-10: “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance ... that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.”

What Paul says here begs the question:

Have you put your hope in the living God, in whom alone is found salvation? Have you?  
Where is your hope today?  
Is your hope in Jesus Christ and His saving work for you as an anchor for your soul?  
(Hebrews 6:19)

If your hope is in yourself, or in anyone or anything else but Jesus, you will be disappointed and put to shame in the end.

Put your hope in God. Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is fully revealed (1 Peter 1:13). Embrace the truth of what Paul says in his letter to Titus, that “having been justified by His grace” – declared righteous in God’s sight on the basis of Christ’s righteousness credited to us – “we (have) become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This,” says Paul, “is a trustworthy saying” (Titus 3:7-8a). You bet it is.

In Colossians 1:23, Paul speaks of “the hope held out in the gospel” by which he means not only the forgiveness of our sins and peace with God here and now, but the confident assurance of eternal life in heaven with God and all His redeemed people. A few verses later,

in verse 27, Paul refers to “the glorious riches of this mystery” – the astounding plan and gracious provision of God for our salvation in Christ, a mystery made known to the world through the message of the gospel, which, he says, is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The fact that Jesus has given us new life and has come to live in us through the Holy Spirit gives us the joyful, confident expectation that we will see and celebrate the full revelation of the glory of God in heaven. This is “the hope of the glory of God” in which we rejoice.

Then there is Peter. His joy in what God has done and the hope that is ours in Christ is so great he can’t keep it in. Almost the first thing out of his mouth in 1 Peter 1 is this: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade – an inheritance kept in heaven for you, who are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1:3-6).

We will talk specifically about rejoicing in suffering and grief next Sunday. But don’t miss what Peter is saying here. Through the Lord Jesus and His saving work for us, through all that He went through for us, we have a living hope for the future. A living hope in a risen and living Savior.

Then Peter continues: “Though you have not seen (Jesus) [with your own eyes], you love Him. Though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him, and you rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and full of glory, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1:8-9).

Do you see what Peter (like Paul) is getting at? Because of Jesus, we have a living hope that can energize and inspire us to love and follow Him. This is a reason to rejoice. Because of Jesus, we have an inheritance awaiting us in heaven. This is a reason to rejoice. We have a gracious and sovereign God who watches over us and protects us, even in times of trouble or suffering. This is a reason to rejoice. We have an unseen Savior who is at work in us to make us strong and mature in Him, and we can be confident that He will finish the good work He has begun in us. This, too, is a reason to rejoice.

The Bible is not a book of make-believe or wishful thinking. It is totally realistic in its assessment of the human condition and of life in this world. Yet it is full of hope, from the first page to the last. The gospel is a “hope-full” message, a message of hope for sinful people who know there is no hope for our salvation, except in the sovereign mercy and grace of God. The church is a “hope-full” fellowship of pilgrims called to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7) and not only to hold on for dear life to the hope we profess (Hebrews 10:23), but to rejoice in it. The church is not only a place of grace. It is a place of hope, too. The Christian life is a “hope-full” life, a life of waiting, oftentimes – yes – but a life of waiting in hope.

As members of God’s family, we are people of hope – a particular kind of hope. Hope *in* God. Hope *in God*. Hope in the saving power and love of Jesus. Hope in the certainty of God’s promises. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God to be revealed when Jesus returns

from heaven and makes all things right. We have the hope of heaven itself, the hope of seeing God in the fullness of His majesty and glory, and being with Him for all eternity. It is a hope that will not disappoint you. Even if it does involve waiting.

Do you have this hope today? You can, by simply coming to the God of hope in humility and faith. Put your hope in God and Him alone.

If you belong to the Lord Jesus by faith and He belongs to you, rejoice. If you have been justified by His grace, rejoice in the hope that is yours. When the highway of your life is smooth, rejoice. When the road is bumpy or you have to take a detour, rejoice. Because God is still in control. Hold onto your hope in Him, because He will never let go of you.

Rejoice in glorious hope, because the Lord is King, and His kingdom shall not fail. Lord, let it be so now and always. Amen.