

Hope in Biblical Perspective
“The Pathway to Hope”
Romans 5:1-5
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In this study, we're going to look at a very familiar passage, but there's a theme here that I think is very important. As we walk into the new year, hear now the Word of God. Romans 5:1-8 says *[1] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* This ends the reading of God's Word. May He use it to bless us and teach us as we look at it together.

We're going to look at this passage because I think it really does address some themes that are very helpful as we start our new year. Pastor Reeder in this past Advent season has been talking about various trinity's and certainly the whole Nativity story centers around the work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit which is perhaps the most fundamental trinity in all of the Christian faith.

He also mentioned a couple of other trinity's, which are really important. He said we worship and our worship needs to be filled with goodness, beauty and truth as he properly emphasized that as a characteristic of our times of worship together. He also spoke of the character of Mary and Joseph as they went through that ordeal of traveling to have a child in very adverse circumstances. He spoke of their lives being filled with faith, hope and love. Faith, hope and love is the trinity of traits/gifts that we also find in I Corinthians 13. That's Paul's love chapter when he's discussing the merits of love, the beauty of love, the necessity of love and he concludes it in I Corinthians 13:13 which says *[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* We frequently see and hear these mentioned in the Word and in preaching and teaching.

We know of the prominence of faith. Faith is such a crucial element. It's by God's grace how we come to a relationship with Christ. We trust Him by faith. We turn from our sin and embrace Christ as Savior and Lord by faith. It's by faith that we live the Christian life as we do our daily walk with Christ. It's the key law of life as the ancient book of Habakkuk 2:4 reminds us that the just or the righteous shall live by faith. That is so important is repeated in Romans 1, and Galatians 3. As a Christian, it's good that you learn that God takes living by faith very seriously. We want to live by sight and certainties. We want to live by fulfilled promises that we see happening. God says to me all the time, “Mark, you are going to have to trust me, because the just shall live by faith.” That's a lifelong lesson.

We also see the prominence of love. Love is such a wonderful Christmas theme. It certainly characterizes one of the fundamental authentications of saving faith, authentic faith. In fact, one of our big responsibilities as believers is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). It's a key trait of the Christian life and it's a key trait of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 15:13, *[13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* God is also characterized by love in all

different areas. John 3:16 says, [16] *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Faith, hope and love – in the middle of faith and love is hope. Certainly, a predominant theme in all of Christian life, but in some ways and I mean this with a smile on my face, hope is kind of the middle child. Some of you are a middle child. That was a concept adopted back in 1960s by a guy named Alfred Adler. He was an Austrian physician. He was fascinated by birth order and I think there's a lot of merit to the effects of birth order in a family. He labeled the middle child as one who is often excluded, ignored or even outright neglected because of where they line the family. Now, I don't really know about that for I'm the second of four, but I was 5 minutes behind my twin so I guess I could be a firstborn or a middle child. I guess families are strange, but if you're a middle child you may understand that. It just seems like in the pantheon of virtues, hope is kind of a middle child between the monuments of faith and love.

In this study I want to look at hope because I think that hope is certainly one of the really needy things in our culture today. We're in a culture that's desperately yearning for hope. Even Christians, as we enter a new year, are longing for hopeful things to happen. It's easy to diminish the importance or the even the possibility of hope, but I can promise you it's desperately needed. Tim Keller, theologian, Christian, apologist and was PCA pastor and co-founder of Redeemer in Manhattan, New York City, which has been very successful wrote a book titled Hope in Times of Fear. It's a study of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and it's especially poignant because Tim Keller himself is struggling with pancreatic cancer, and hope is a very relevant topic to him. In the book, he does an analysis of our culture, and I think it's very helpful to set the context for this discussion of hope. He writes 'For at least two centuries, Western cultures have been animated by a powerful hope that history was progressive, that the human race was moving inevitably toward creating a world of greater and greater safety, prospect, and freedom, but then came the 20th century.'

In 1947, W.H. Auden wrote his book length poem entitled *Age of Anxiety*. Keller says that few people read the book, but many were intrigued by the title because it grabbed what he said was the cultural moment of our day. He writes this; 'In less than four decades, the world had passed through two world wars, a pandemic in 1918 and the Great Depression, and at the time was headed into decades of nuclear armed Cold War between the West and communist nations.' Yet Keller observes, "when the Cold War ended in 1989, the older belief in the inevitable human progress seemed to revive. Some even declared that the lethal struggles between the great Western ideologies, fascism and communism in Western democracies were finally over. International capitalism, fueled by globalism, went into high gear, and many economies seem to be thriving." Keller cites one author by the name of Noah Harari, 'who argues that we have managed to reign in famine, war and plague, and we don't need to pray to any god or saint to rescue us from them. We know quite well what needs to be done in order to prevent famine, plague and war, and we usually succeed in doing it.'

Keller cites another author by the name of Adam Solomon that agrees but then is almost puzzled by what he really sees as he looks at life in America in the past 20 or 30 years. Sullivan said that he and others "don't have a way of explaining why, for example, there is so much profound discontent, depression, drug abuse, despair, addiction, and loneliness in the most advanced liberal cultures in society for as we have slowly and surely attained more progress, we have lost something that undergirds all of its meaning, cohesion and a different, deeper kind of happiness than the satisfaction of all our earthly needs." Keller is building the case that it is a very pessimistic day now.

Keller concludes by saying, “It is very hard and people are very discouraged. There's a need for hope. By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the number of people believing in a better life for their children began to decline again. Pessimism about the future for our children and society has only deepened over the past 15 or 20 years. As a variety of polls and surveys show, some point to a polarization and fragmentation in society that goes far beyond the usual political partisanship. There is a growing tribalism that reveals a culture in which there is a vacated center, a loss of any shared idea of common public good. There's a profound loss of social trust that appears to be undermining all institutions that have held our society together.” Keller further elaborates on the need of hope in our society and that that leaks over into the church.

We live in a world of increasing hopelessness and part of the problem is people seek hope through ways that don't ultimately provide it. For instance, people seek hope in at least three areas. One is in security. For instance, they think, ‘If I'm secure enough, then I'll have hope’ and then they seek it in government, in armies and police departments, even in fire departments. They seek it in technologies, burglar alarms and firearms or they pursue it in wealth through investments with gold to guard themselves from loss or danger. Thinking ‘If I can just make my life secure, I'll have hope.’

Secondly, others seek hope in peace. If I can just make my surroundings peaceful, then I will have hope. People shield themselves from all kinds of conflict. They isolate themselves from difficult situations. They spend vast sums of money and resources to guard themselves from disease, other people, and factors in the environment, saying ‘if I can eliminate any threat in my life, then I'll have hope.’

Thirdly, some seek hope by gorging on comfort. They say, ‘if I can just have a little more comfort, then I'll have hope.’ They accumulate huge amounts of resources and spend feverishly to provide for every single comfort they can. In fact, they elevate the accumulation of things to a way of life and Amazon flourishes. They think ‘if I can just have a little more (that next box that shows up on my front door) then I'm going to have some hope.’ Yet, clearly these things are falling short in a society that's largely unraveling in many ways. We can put the blame here and there and discuss it for a long time, but hope is missing. Hope is needed and the Bible gives us a sure foundation of where to find that hope.

First, in this passage from Romans 4, Paul looks at the foundation of hope, which incidentally, was written in a time when the church enjoyed very little security, peace and extremely little comfort. He writes that believers enjoy two things. In Romans 5:1 they enjoy saving faith, and this is monumental. It says [1] *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* That is the key, the core and the beginning place of finding hope in your life today. Now, realize in a church like that, most of us understand saving faith. That is, we know the gift of faith where we have stepped out and trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior, and embraced Him, where we began to walk with Him and understand the confidence that hope brings for all eternity, but it's mind boggling and life changing when we embrace Christ as Lord and Savior. Never start looking for hope anywhere else except there. Don't let your friends start looking for hope if they're missing it because it's really going to start in that saving faith we see in Romans 5:1.

There's a Christian singing group by the name of Cain that's written some lively little songs but I love the lyrics to the one titled I'm So Blessed;

I'm so blessed (I'm so blessed)

Hallelujah, I'm blessed

*I'm so blessed (I'm so blessed)
Hallelujah, I'm blessed
[Verse 1]
Trouble knocking at my door today
I ain't gonna let it in
And worry wanna steal my joy away
But I ain't gonna let it win
[Pre-Chorus]
'Cause on my best day, I'm a child of God
On my worst day, I'm a child of God
Oh, every day is a good day
And You're the reason why
[Chorus]
I'm so blessed, I'm so blessed
Got this heartbeat in my chest
No, it doesn't matter about the rest
If I got You Lord, I'm so blessed*

It's a great summation. The Apostle Paul would probably sing that if he were here today. He'd love that song because in the ups and downs of life, in the persecutions and difficulties of life, he knew saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this passage, Paul moves on from saving faith to what I would call standing faith. That's kind of my terminology of Romans 5:2 which says [2] *Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*** I'm speaking here of that grace that enables us to have a faith that stands strong, not just at the beginning, but daily in the trials and tribulations of life. It stands strong against fears, losses, temptation and failures. Despite the vacillations of our fickle hearts and minds, it stands strong. The Apostle Paul urges his friends in Ephesus in Ephesians 6:13 which says [13] *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*

This what that saving faith and standing faith are through which we endure the trials and tribulations of life and therefore the end Romans 5:2 is appropriate, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. That needs to be the characteristic of our lives so that when push comes to shove, in thick and thin, ups and downs, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. You might be thinking, 'how do I cultivate this hope? How do I encourage it in my life?' The problem is often we rejoice in the hope of saving faith, but then, even as Christians, we have become obsessed with seeking the security, peace and comforts of the world and we do it in many ways; in what we buy, in who we vote for, in where we live, and in the security we gather around ourselves as Christians.

Now, those are important issues, but they are not the most fundamental. Paul in Romans 5 gives us the pathway to hope. We should pursue hope in what Hebrews 12:2 says; [2] *looking to **Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,** who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* We are to pursue the hope that is found in the Lord Jesus Himself. We pursue Him.

We find the conversion story of the Apostle Paul's life in the book of Acts. He was converted on the road to Damascus when he was directly confronted by Jesus Christ, who he thought perhaps was just a long gone dead religious leader. Jesus said to him, 'Why do you

persecute Me?’ Can you imagine the leader that you thought was long dead, that you hated to see and were persecuting his followers, suddenly is speaking to you? Paul was profoundly touched and stunned by the incarnation that Jesus, the Creator of the universe, who put the stars in their place, would condescend to come to earth in this life to live and possess you and me.

I've just finished reading a book by Kelly Kapic. He's a professor at Covenant College near Chattanooga, and it's called *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*. It's a wonderful book that I highly recommend. It gives a wonderful description of how the incarnation, the embodied Christ, is our source of hope. Kapic writes this; “The purpose of the incarnation was not that Jesus merely dies, but that He lives as one with us, and only then to offer Himself as one for us.” It's that living with us that often we need to be refreshed on again and again.

Kapic goes on to say “God can't taste dust, God can't get sick or become hungry, nor can God die. Such events apply only to creatures that have bodies and out of His love, the Father sent His Son in the Spirit to take on genuine flesh to become fully human. Only in this way can the eternal Lord, the God who cannot die, enter the reality of suffering and death. Only in this way can the God of light face the darkness of the devil. Only in this way can the incarnate God enter the pit of the grave in order to fill it with life. His death encompasses both the physical and the spiritual aspects of His humanity in their unity. Jesus physically suffered and Jesus physically died. Jesus' substitution life and death changed everything for us, for He is the great revelation of the eternal God's love and commitment to us.”

Jesus came to earth and experienced every temptation that you could. He experienced every hardship. He experienced, the grave, the torture, the difficulty, and the shame of this world was dumped upon Him. So, we can say, above all, Jesus gets it. Jesus understands. He knows exactly what it's like to live and interact in a world that is hostile to Him, in a world that's filled with a lack of hope. In this world, filled with anger, rejection, sorrow, pain, hatred, disappointment and shame, Jesus experienced it all. He has the T-shirt, so to speak. We can't ever accuse Him that He just doesn't understand because that's why He came. He does understand. That's why He went to the cross.

For instance, in the wilderness in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, Satan tempts Jesus directly after 40 days in the wilderness and not eating. He tempts Jesus with the security of the angels. He tempts Jesus with the peace that comes with power. He tempts Jesus with the comfort that comes from bread. Jesus doesn't bite, so to speak. Jesus doesn't fall for it, because Jesus knows that to seek security, peace and comfort Satan's way, is futile and enslaving. Jesus kept focusing on His Heavenly Father in the calling that He had on His life. The same Jesus is with me and you right now as we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. This changes my perspective radically.

If you don't appreciate how radically that should change your perspective, then read Romans 5:3. Try to share Romans 5:3 with somebody that doesn't know Christ and doesn't understand hope and difficulty. Romans 5:3-5 says [3] *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Hope isn't found in the security, peace and comforts of this world, but is found in Christ. Paul makes this astounding statement which teaches us that hope blossoms in the fertile soil of suffering. Now, I'm not saying suffering is good in the sense that we should like it. Do we seek it? No, not at all. I'm not suggesting some kind of ascetic lifestyle, but rejoicing in that suffering

doesn't undermine hope but it actually fortifies and establishes that hope. I serve a loving, incarnated Christ who cares for me far more than my momma ever did. He cares for me because I am His child, His friend and I'm walking with Him as He is measuring things out in my life precisely in a careful way so that hope, love and faith might all be cultivated with Him.

In Christ, suffering fortifies our hope. We read about Jesus, who is always with us in Hebrews 4:15 which says *[15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

You can't say Jesus doesn't understand. Hebrews 5:8 says, *[8] Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.* He didn't learn obedience through security, peace or comfort. No, He learned obedience in what He suffered and that's astonishing. We may think 'God, you don't understand what I'm going through. I can't believe You put me through this.' No, He understands.

Hebrews 12:2-3 says, *[2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

Jesus knew all the suffering that we know. He knew all the uncertainty, that even coming to the garden of Gethsemane, He asked that the coming crucifixion would be taken from Him. Yet He says, 'Not My will, but Thy will be done.' We still tend to think, 'But Jesus, You don't understand what it's like.' He says to us, "I do understand what trust is like when I'm facing something that I don't like that I wish would go away" and yet all we hear from God, "Trust Me. Walk with Me." And our hope in Him is fortified.

That suffering is seen in Paul's life. II Corinthians 12 is where Paul talks about his thorn in the flesh. We don't know what that is. There's a lot of speculation about it though. Most think it's probably some kind of persistent medical condition that hampered his ministry or so he thought. Paul prayed three times that it would be removed and it wasn't. Jesus said to him in II Corinthians 12:9, *[9] But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* Paul understands that the point isn't his comfort in peace but it's that the power of God be displayed through him.

Sometimes Christians talk about needing a miracle in their life where they want God to do a miracle through them. Well, the incarnation coming into your life is a miracle and the expression of that incarnation in your patients, your loving kindness, and your hope, is a powerful miracle to the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. This suffering, carefully measured out by a loving Savior who is in me and with me, may not make my life peaceful. It may not make my life comfortable, which I prefer, but suffering does produce, it's very productive.

In Romans 5, Paul talks about two things that suffering produces. One is endurance and patience and perseverance are benefits which now bear fruit in me and prepare us for eternity. Suffering isn't likable. It's not fun, but it's actually the soil from which hope grows. One of my heroes is Joni Eareckson Tada. At 16 she was in a diving accident that snapped her spinal cord and has been a quadriplegic since then. She is currently in her 70s and though she's much more advanced in years, she still has wonderful testimonies how God has used that in her life. She actually says from the furnace of her suffering, "I have hope in the future. The Bible speaks about bodies being glorified. I know the meaning of that now. It's the time after my death here, when I, the quadriplegic, will be on my feet dancing." She anticipates that time when the

difficulties of this life will break free, and she'll be free in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ forever. Endurance is something that God has worked in her over the years. It's a great testimony to me. I've heard her speak a few times and she is remarkable in the way she's endured through cancer and other problems but God has worked in her in a mighty way.

Paul then says in Romans 5:4 that endurance produces character, that godliness in us. The term character in the Greek is really stressing what is proven under pressure, what is tested and proven to be genuine and authentic. The fires of suffering produce endurance, which proves and improves our character in relationship with God and becomes pleasing to God and even to others. Peter writes in I Peter 2:12, *[12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* Another translation says it this way; live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day that He visits us.

I've enjoyed reading some of the writings of Joseph Stoll, and in it he has a recurring theme that we Christians are the gazing stock of the world. When they wonder about God, who they will look at, they're going to look at you and me, and we need to take that very seriously and understand that that's God's plan. We're the gazing stock of the world because God wants us to be the gazing stock of the world, because God is in us through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will see hopefully miracle after miracle as our character endures, grows and strengthens for that's what God intends – that ability to reflect God's character in the midst of difficulty is the source of hope.

Acts 5 is the story where the Apostles, amid preaching after the resurrection, they were preaching in the temple and it was driving the religious leaders crazy. So they arrested them once and said, 'Don't do it anymore.' But they went back to doing it. The religious leaders went back to the temple and found the Apostles preaching again. So they arrested them again and Acts 5 they said, "Stop preaching in the name of Christ." They were denounced. They were beaten and they were commanded not to speak for Christ, but their endurance gave a remarkable testimony and we can see how it fired up their hope in Acts 5:41-42 which says *[41] Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.*

Hopeful Christians must have drove those antagonists' crazy says. They were probably saying things like 'The more we persecute them, the more hopeful they get. The more we give them a hard time, the more excited they become about their faith. How can we stop them? All our efforts are failing.' That is a miraculous expression of the hope of Christ. It's in all of us if Christ is in us.

In conclusion here is one takeaway and it's this; seeking security, peace and comfort in this world, apart from Christ ultimately will lead to hopelessness. I mean, you may have episodes that you feel more hopeful than others based on the circumstances, but apart from Christ it will ultimately will lead to hopelessness. Rather, hope is found in a steadfast faith in the incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus who is in us and with us for His own glory by the Spirit as He works His Word in us, working with us, in us and through us.

Several years ago, the noted British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, was a guest speaker at a breakfast in Washington, DC. When he had finished his testimony, he made a number of comments about world culture and world affairs, of which most of his comments were very pessimistic. Richard Halvorson, the chaplain of the Senate, was reporting this, and he

said that one of the Christians present said to the speaker, “Dr. Muggeridge, you have been very pessimistic about this world. Don't you have any reason for optimism?” Muggeridge replied, “My friend, I could not be more optimistic than I am because my hope is found in Jesus Christ alone.” Halverson says that Muggeridge paused and let that sink in and then concluded his comment by saying, ‘Just think, if the Apostolic Church had pinned its hope on the Roman Empire.’ My friends don't pin your hope on the Roman Empire. It's very tempting to do so, but pin it on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray together.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much that You, Lord, did not stay in heaven and just throw us a rule book and say, ‘Have fun.’ The Lord Jesus came to earth in the person of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank You for what you did in experiencing all that we experience in going to the cross and carrying the burden of our sin. We thank You, Heavenly Father, that He broke the power of sin and death by His death on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead. I thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are with us, that You guard and protect us, but I pray in this New Year as we venture into all the experiences that will come both good and difficult, that You will work through us and that we will become trophies of Your grace, that we will be the gazing stock of this world that changes lives. When we long to have a miraculous deliverance, help us realize that You may have something far better in mind, by our life and our experiences than just our comfort and peace. Father, we pray that You will use us all for Your glory, so that someday, when we stand in Your presence, you'll say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” May we see people join us in Your presence that would have never come apart from our testimony of You working in and through us. Thank You so much and we pray these prayers in Jesus' Name and for His sake, Amen.