



“Hope in God!”

Romans 15:13



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WORLD WAR II CORRESPONDENT, Ernie Pyle, saw a lot of suffering and death. Once deeply discouraged, he wrote to a friend, "I wish you'd shine any of your light in my direction. God knows I've run out of light."

I believe that's the need of many people in the world today. On every side we see things that greatly distress us.

During World War II Winston Churchill spoke of Great Britain and the U.S.A. and said, "Here we are, and here we stand, a veritable rock of salvation in this drifting world..." Well, that almost seems tragically humorous to us today. There is nothing solid, nothing saving in Britain or in the United States.

Let me tell you where there truly is hope – Romans 15:13:

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

OUR ANCHOR AND ROCK

See Who God is: our God is the God of hope. Paul, in writing this letter to the Romans, laid out the Gospel, the good news of God, and in fifteen theology-packed chapters systematically showed us the contents of our faith. Then he ends with this remarkable verse. What a wonderful prayer for those friends in Rome! They needed the God of hope. They lived in tragic days, What a wonderful prayer for us!

Paul prays that they will delight in God, that they will enjoy all possible joys that are theirs in Christ. He says, "God help them to experience fullness of the blessings that they can have in God!"

The good news of salvation is our ground of hope. Romans 8:32 gives the attitude of God, the desires of God for us:

"He Who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

We have reason to hope, my friends! What a name for God, - the God of hope, the God of certainty, the God of stability, the God of mighty plans – He is never surprised. He has been and He is Lord over time and events, over the nations and over your own life. As verse 4 says it, all the Old Testament was also written to proclaim the God of all sovereignty and comfort:

"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

God is our God of hope, not just for tomorrow, my friends, not just for the future. He is the God of hope for today, our hope in the present.

You see, the God of hope changes our view of our present situation. When you know the God of hope, you have a different outlook on the whole world. That's why I want this verse to get hold of you:

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

OUR HOPE IS CERTAINTY

"Hope" here is not wishing, as we think of hope today. We say, "I hope so-and-so happens," but we're not sure if it will. There's nothing uncertain in the biblical word "hope;" it's not speculating. Hope is in God, sure, steadfast, dependable. Hope is a noun; it is not a verb. It's not something we do; it's what we have in our God.

"O God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come..."

People are short on hope. Our age has sagging hopes. A man reaches 40 or 50, feels unfilled in his life and says, "Nuts! What's the use!" And he blows his life. A young person says, "It isn't worth it." And he "checks out" of being responsible.

Christianity Today years ago had an editorial about hope. One paragraph said this:

"'Hope is what they want,' said an Air Force chaplain referring to servicemen headed for Vietnam.

"'Hope is what they need.' whispered a medical doctor of critically ill patients in his care.

"Hope is what they've lost," said an attendant of his charges at a state mental hospital..."

God Himself gives it; He sustains it; He crowns hope.

God is our hope in three tenses. He is our hope, for all our past. Christ said when He died on the cross, "It is finished! All the work for your forgiveness and salvation is done." We sing it:

*"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness..."*

*"On Christ the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."*

Christ is our hope for the present:

*"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God,
to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28)*

He makes all things work together, make sense.

He's our hope for the future. It's God Who planned your tomorrow:

*"I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans of welfare and not
of calamity, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11)*

OUR HOPE IS ABUNDANT

In Christ, friend, we are affluent with hope! The Bible says here,

"Now may the God of hope fill you, ... that you may abound..."

We become the containers of hope. The word "abound" is an interesting word in this text: it means that we have more hope than is necessary. You have more available than you could possibly use! It means that you cannot measure the hope that God gives you; it's super-added. "Abounding" is the word used for the waves coming in on the beach. They wash in, continually, relentlessly, one after another, cleaning up the beach, relentless coming in, whether you're awake or asleep, - coming in, coming in. Now, that's the way God's hope comes into your life:

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound..."

abound... abound...

in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

My friend, if God is for you and He has hope, who can be against you and make you hopeless? One of the most tragic things a Christian can be is hopeless. Every person in Christ ought to be optimistic! Sure, we recognize that there are problems and troubles and things you cannot understand. But your hope is in God "Who is above all, through all, and in all," Who runs this whole thing. It's an insult to God for any believer to be gloomy! For a Christian to be skimpy in hope is probably one of the most common forms of worldliness. I see it everywhere in the church today. To doubt, to complain, to murmur, to be gloomy, to be crabby, to be fearful – we must call it what it is: sin!

In this world today, as Christians our distinctive has to be hope. Be a believing believer, friend! What a tragic thing to be an unbelieving believer! Friend, Jesus is Lord! We have a blessed hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't say, "I believe in the Second Coming of Christ, but I think everything today is awful!" Everything today is not awful. There is much in which we see God at work. There are tragedies, there are troubles, but God is working out all things to His ultimate glory. If you hassle problems as though God the Spirit were not working in your life; if you worry over present problems as though the Word of God were not available to you for answers and help; if you are anxious and upset as though the church did not have loving believers in it to support you and see you through, you miss all that God is willing to say about a lifestyle for the Christian in a dark age:

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing..."

Sometimes it's funny, in a tragic sort of way, to see a happy child of God come rejoicing into a group of gloomy Christians. Here they are, so down, and everything is so bad, and here comes a bright, happy believer: "Oh, it's wonderful! Praise God! Isn't it good to be a Christian?" Whether they say it or not, the aroma they give off is, "Let's get rid of him! He's simplistic, probably impractical. He just doesn't know the facts. If he knew the problem, he'd be gloomy like us." No, believing believers can know all the problems, but they know more: they know the God of hope, and He fills them "with all joy and peace in believing."

Adoniram Judson, the great missionary to Burma, was in prison there because of his witness. And he was lying on his cot burning up with a fever. Mail came months

late, and he got a letter from home asking, "How's the outlook?" Adoniram Judson wrote back, "The outlook is as bright as the promises of God."

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

Friend, hope is God's holy optimism freely offered to you – and you'd better have it in today's world.

GOD'S GIFT

Now, our verse says that the God of hope fills us with joy and peace. This is not something we work up, but something He brings down by the Holy Spirit. Joy is the mark of Christian authenticity. It's the delicious excitement of being with God Himself through His beloved Son. Peace is your knowing that all is well with Christ. I like what Spurgeon says. "Peace is joy resting; joy is peace dancing."

But notice it says "all joy and peace." God says He wants to fill you with every kind of joy and peace, with all facets of joy and peace. Not a miserable trickle of them, my friend; not a drip with an eye dropper giving you a little squirt now and then. God in His heaven turns on the faucet; He lets you have it! He fills you with joy and peace!

Jesus put it this way:

"If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink... from out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water."

The rivers of God's grace going into us, the rivers of God's grace going out through us – "rivers of living water" – rivers, rivers, rivers, my friend! He wants to fill you to completion – that's the thought of the word. To fill you full, to fill you to the brim. God knows the best joy and peace; He knows how to give it in the best way. He knows every nook and cranny of your life, and He wants to fill you, to saturate you, the "total you," with joy and peace!

GOD'S METHOD – BELIEVE!

Well, how does God do this? How does He make you abound with hope so that you're filled with joy and peace? There are two ways: His part, and your part. And your part is to believe Him.

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

Your part is to live in the constant atmosphere of faith – in believing. The word is in the present tense. It means that you're to act habitually in a believing spirit. When I see a sour person, I say, "There's an unbeliever in that situation, in this particular time of his life. He's unbelieving." Work and walk and talk and be in the presence of God in hope, believing Him. Have an attitude of "Lord, I believe You. I believe what You've said; I believe what You've done; I believe what You will do; I believe God!"

Believing is your response to God's love and grace. Joy and peace are God's response to your faith. Faith, then, is deep confidence, marvelous hope in God's sovereignty, in God's love for you. However bad the world may look, you know in God you have hope. And you believe Him. I like what the new Scofield Bible reference says in Romans 8:

"Christian experience is not something which is going on around the believer, but that which is going on within him."

LIVE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

You see, the believing person lives from the inside out! – not from the outside world into him, therefore depressing him, discouraging him, making him hopeless. But rather, it's living with God at the very core of your life and living from the inside out in faith.

As long as you exercise faith, the God of hope will pour in joy and peace and you will become a hopeful person. But when you turn off the valve of faith you dry up your joy and peace and you become hopeless. Yesterday's faith was fine for yesterday – it is no good for today. It can only serve as a memory of what happens when you believe God.

When we lived in Afghanistan, we had one radio station to listen to, that once in awhile would have a little news in English. Before and after the news there was just one piece of Western music, I suppose the only record they had. Over and over again, for three months, we listened to that one song: "I believe in Yesterday"! In this backward country, with its tragically ancient way of life, that's all we heard: "I Believe in Yesterday"! Every morning at breakfast, "I Believe in Yesterday"! Boy, did they!

I think that that is the "theme song" of many Christians! "I Believe in Yesterday"! Listen, the Christians in this world who are most likely to succeed are not the smartest or the most talented. They are those who believe God the most. Now, that's true!

The future of our church and all of us as people depends on whether we as a body of believers or as individual Christians choose to live in the atmosphere of faith, or in the atmosphere of gloom or doubt. For those who will believe, God will do mighty things. They are "blessable." You choose your atmosphere: it's gloom and doubt, or hope and trust in the Lord; smog, or clear air: you choose it. By the grace of God, let us be people who follow the God of hope. When we have believed in the Gospel of God and we have Him as our Lord, we ought to be able to say, "Now may the God of hope fill me with all joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit." That's our part – having an atmosphere of faith.

POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God's part is the power of the Holy Spirit, as the text says. He helps you to abound in hope. Spirit-led, Spirit-filled, Spirit-directed people are released to believe God largely. The fruit of the Spirit is faith-full-ness. The same Holy Spirit that Genesis 1:2 says:

"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving on the surface of the waters. And God said, let there be light; and there was light."

The same Spirit that changed everything in creation is the Spirit that wants to change you from hopelessness to hope.

Paul the apostle writes in Romans 8:

"Once the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you, He will, by the same Spirit bring to your whole being new strength and vitality." (Phillips)

It takes the Spirit Who raised Christ from the dead to do this in your life or it will never happen. It's miracle; it's supernatural; it's God at work in your life.

Years ago I met a missionary who was a real believer. He had an atmosphere of faith. There was music, there was joy in his life. He was working in Japan where they see very little results of the ministry. I asked him, "What gives you joy?" And he said, "When I came to Japan, I vowed that every day I would sing a hymn of praise to God." I call you to live abundantly, not doubtfully.

Years ago, a believer was reading one of the earliest maps of our North American continent. Not much of the land had been penetrated yet, and in one place someone had written "Here are scorpions;" in another place, "Here are spiders;"

in another, "Here are giants;" and "Here are lions." The Christian man crossed out every one of those comments and wrote largely across the map: "Here is God!"

Identify one area of your life where you sense hopelessness. It's more than you can handle; you've been struggling with it. What is it? Identify it. Then write across, "Here is God." Yesterday I was praying over this verse, and I began to pray about other things and I realized I'd been wrestling and fretting over a family problem. I also realized there was nothing I could do about it.

And I said, "Here I'm going to be preaching on the 'God of Hope,' and I find there's a sigh in my life, a bit of a 'down'." And I said, "Lord, I turn this whole thing over to You." And you know, there came again joy and peace in my heart; such relief! What is that place of scorpions and dragons for you? Will you give it to the Lord?

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