

All Roads Lead Here: The Hope Anchor
By Jason Huff
April 9, 2017
Isaiah 42:1-9; John 14:1-7; Romans 5:1-5

Our final Scripture reading today is again Romans 5:1-5. May God add His blessings on the reading of His holy Word. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

This last week, we visited the historical triangle of Williamsburg, VA. The first side of the triangle is Williamsburg itself, which is restored to the colonial era, and it's filled with townspeople who tell you about life in 1700s America. Nearby is Jamestown, the first British colony in North America. And the third leg of the historic triangle is Yorktown, where the final major battle of the Revolutionary War was fought. It was fascinating to learn how close the revolution came to defeat. Supplies ran out; the British won many battles; winters were harsh; the American soldiers were untrained militias, not professional soldiers like the British army.

Our ancestors kept at it because they firmly believed in their cause. They believed that people had to consent to their government – that paying British taxes without representation in British government made them slaves for the British Empire. (It's one reason why the anti-slavery movement in America started during the Revolutionary War.) They had a vision, a hope, of self-rule, self-government, freedom. Their hope got them through the difficult years of war.

Christians have hope, too, but hope that puts even the American revolutionaries to shame. We learn about that hope in the second half of Romans 5:1-5. Last week, we found security in verses 1-2 – we are already justified and seen as right in the sight of God, we have peace with God (we're no longer at war with Him), and we have access to the Father – we can approach Him with confidence. The second half of Romans 5 confirms our security with God and takes it to the next level. It shows us how hope is woven into our security, and hope gives us reason to rejoice.

The first sentence tells us that we Christians “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Let's break that down. The word “rejoice” here is not the typical word for joy or celebration. It means boasting, pride in the very best way. There's actually a pun going on in the Greek. We glory – we celebrate, we rejoice, we boast, we show our pride – in the hope of God's glory – His awesomeness, His power, His immense mercy and love and might. Think of the parades after WWII ended. Think the Thanksgiving Day parade. Think of the celebration at Times Square on New Years' Eve. It's even greater than that's the level of celebration. And it's a celebration where we have immense pride, even boasting, because we're celebrating God – the One always worth celebrating.

We rejoice in the *hope* of the glory of God. What comes to mind when you think of the word “hope”? Hope is a fickle word to us. “I hope it doesn't rain on our vacation.” “I hope I get that new job.” “I hope I get an A on my test.” “I hope my doctor's visit goes OK.” Hope often is just a kind of wish. In most situations, hope means that we want something to happen, but we don't have much confidence that it will happen. That's our typical definition of hope.

But godly hope is far different. This hope is an anchor, rooted, strong, bold, able to keep a ship from drifting. Paul pairs these two words – we rejoice in hope. It's boasting in our supreme confidence. It's joy in assurance. Here's the best way to understand it – hope is faith for the future. Faith looks into the past and sees and hears about all that God has done and says, “Yes, I believe that was really the case, and I'm going to live my life like it did and it matters.” Hope is the future component of faith. Hope is the part that says, “Because God acted in my benefit in the past, I know He is going to act for my benefit in the future.”

You do not need to wish for God to do something. You don't need to pray to make your wish stronger. You have hope. You have confidence that God keeps His word. You can pray boldly about anything – anything! – and know you will be heard. God may not answer the way you want, but you can have confidence that He is listening and is responding in your best interest. Because He's done it in the past, you have true hope – true confidence – in your future.

Now our rejoicing is in the *glory* of God. We glory in the glory of God. We are confident that what we see only in glimpses will be on full display. We live confident that God will reveal Himself – that He will reveal Himself to our family and friends that they might believe, and that He would reveal Himself at the end of the age so that all things would be put right.

We also glory in God's glory because that glory is a part of what we will become. In chapter 3, we were told that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But the promise of Jesus is that we will share in the glory of God. We have been declared like Jesus by the Father, and we will be made like Jesus so that we have His glory and reflect His glory for all eternity. We rejoice in the assured hope that God will make us like Himself in His perfection and that we will enjoy His full and rich presence for evermore.

Now comes the tougher part. Paul says, “Not only so” – our only rejoicing is not just in that awesome hope – “but we also rejoice in our sufferings.” That's tricky. We could argue that Paul is wrong. We don't boast in our sufferings. Suffering often makes us question God. So let's dig a little deeper here too.

Everybody goes through suffering. Everyone knows the pain of loss, the nastiness of being sick, the heartbreak of so many things. That's not what Paul is talking about. The ordinary sufferings of humanity are a part of life. Paul wants us to hand those over to God too. Yet that's a given to Paul. We live in an era and a place where major suffering is still around, but not commonplace; we don't have to scrounge for every meal; we aren't dying of malnutrition or plague or dysentery. And we look for ways to help people who *are* suffering. We question God when money gets tight or we get a chronic problem. Those issues were typical during Paul's time. They were expected as part of the human experience cursed by sin. Paul expects that we will trust in God despite those things.

What Paul is talking about used to be translated as “tribulations,” and that's probably the best word for it. It's the sufferings we go through specifically because we are believers. For Paul, that meant imprisonments, beatings, attempts on his life, days and nights with no lodging or food, at least one shipwreck – he went through a lot to spread word of Jesus. In many parts of the world, these are still going on, and they are pretty severe. We prayed for Pastor Saeed who spent years in prison for his faith, and now we're praying for Andrew Brunson, who's been in prison in Turkey for six months because of his faith.

We at CrossWay haven't suffered in that way, but we all have felt the effects of tribulations brought about by faith. Many of us were a part of Church of the Covenant, and we had to leave a building behind in order to be faithful to God's Word. I have had folks I thought were my friends no longer speak to me because we left our former denomination. Maybe you have too. We have been denied rental space on more than one occasion because we are a church. We meet at 2pm on Sundays rather than a typical Sunday morning slot because that's all that's available to us. And I am proud of all of you who have stuck it out and worshipped on Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons to be a part of our fellowship. These tribulations haven't come because we're a bad church. They've come because we're tried to be a faithful church.

That willingness to stand our ground proves what Paul says. Why would we rejoice in tribulations? Why would we rejoice that we can't meet on Sunday mornings because some folks won't rent to us? Why can we boast about trials we've faced because of our beliefs? Because “we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

When we suffer because of our faith and trust in Jesus, when we stay with Him and do not abandon ship, when we put out our anchor of hope, we persevere. We make it through the trial. We come out on the other side of the dark tunnel. Perseverance builds character because character is who we are after we've come through difficulty.

Those American revolutionaries had a different character in 1775 than they did in 1781. In 1775 they were mostly simple farmers. The battles they went through took them from being a ragtag army of misfits into a force capable of outrunning and outlasting the greatest fighting force in the world at that time. By 1781, having fought side by side and hand in hand, they were still Virginians and New Yorkers, Bostonians and Southerners, but they were all Americans.

Our character changes when we give up things for our faith – if we've moved, if we've left behind friends, if we've lost something for our beliefs, our character changes. We can complain about it. But we are urged to rejoice because God is producing character in us. He is giving us the internal resolve to keep up the fight. He is taking the lead in our souls and forging it into His steel. Through suffering for the faith, God's character is built into our spiritual DNA.

This is true for the church in all places and all times. The church has stood strongest and been most compelling when it has faced deep struggles. China banned Christianity and persecuted believers; now there are 100 million Christians in China. The churches that have done best in America are ones that have not shrunk back when faced with ridicule for believing in miracles and the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus. Those who do not persevere in the struggle and compromise the faith have withered, even though they were once huge.

What is the final result of character? Hope. God has taken us through the storms; He has seen us through adversity; He has been our rock and helped us stand our ground when the cannonballs of the enemy have made us want to run off the battlefield. Why do we have hope? Because God has been faithful! Our future is secure because God has been there in the past! He has proven Himself time and again. That CrossWay still exists after all our hiccups and problems means we can trust Him to take care of us how He sees fit. If we last a year or twenty years, God has been faithful, and we have hope in Him that He will continue to be faithful.

As Paul says, “Hope does not disappoint us.” That’s a pretty strong thing to say. We’re often disappointed in things. You’re disappointed on vacation when you don’t get to see everything you wanted to see. If everything goes perfectly, you’re disappointed it had to end! Everyday things disappoint us. Yet the imperfections in the church sometimes disappoint us as well. Our Christian friends are still human and sometimes fail us. Churches are flawed; we get things wrong; pastors hurt others, not intentionally but because we’re flawed too. Our prayers don’t receive the answers we want – and sometimes that means that someone dies, someone’s in pain, someone’s in trouble, and there’s no solution. Why does our hope in God not disappoint us when things are hard or painful or frustrating or sad?

Here’s why: “because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” We aren’t disappointed because God loves us. He loves us completely, truly, deeply, fiercely, neverendingly. When we believe in God, He pours His love into us. The old King James Version said, God “shed abroad” His love into our hearts. Every inch of our hearts is filled with the love of God. Not the reverse, not love for God, necessarily, though that does come. It’s the love God has for us – steady, secure, patient, good love.

When we know that God loves us, we can live with the insecurities and disappointments of life because God is working through them. Our parents who loved us kept us from immediate harm, but they also didn’t give us our heart’s every desire. When my parents didn’t take me to the movies every night or buy me every toy I wanted, that didn’t mean they didn’t love me. They actually loved me enough to do what was best for me, not what I most wanted in the moment.

When we are filled with God’s love, we recognize that not every prayer is going to have a “yes” answer; not everything we want in life will happen. Even good things may be missed; good requests may still be answered with a “no.” But for those of us who trust in God, that doesn’t matter so very much. Why? Because we know the love God has for us. That love is permanent, real, fulfilling. The things we ask for are often momentary.

And because we know the love of God, we know He wants us to keep coming to Him. Are there big, eternal things you are asking for that don’t seem answered? Don’t give up. Maybe the reason you haven’t led that friend to Christ, maybe the reason we haven’t seen a bunch of new members, maybe the reason things have stalled in your spiritual life, is because God wants more time with you. He wants you to come to Him time and again. He is not answering “no” but “not yet” so that you will give Him the glory He deserves when He does say “yes.” We will know His love more fully and love Him the more in return.

And this love God pours into our hearts isn't just a metaphor. It's real. God "has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us." When we know the love God has for us, it's because the Holy Spirit is with us, inside us, guiding us, directing us, steering our conscience, reminding us of God's ways, silently leading us and pleading with us along His paths. Ever since Jesus came, God has been with us one way or another. The Holy Spirit is the third part of the Trinity, so when we have the Spirit, we have the Father and Son with us as well. Just as Jesus told His disciples that when they had seen Him, they had seen the Father, when we have the Holy Spirit, we have Jesus and the Father with us.

Why do we have hope? Because God is with us. His love is with us. His Spirit is with us. 2 Corinthians 1:22 says that the Spirit is God's deposit with us as a guarantee, the first installment of all that is to come. And the cool thing is, God's deposit is securing us! We are His purchase bought with the blood of Jesus. He has already made payment, but He gives us the Holy Spirit to show that the purchase is good and that He will be coming to claim us as His own.

Do we need to fear or worry? No. All we have is faith in Jesus, and God gives us all the rest. He says we're already right in His sight. He declares the end to the war with us and gives us peace. He gives us access to Himself. He gives us reason to boast in hope, even in hardships, because we know His love for us and have His Spirit with us at all times.

When we leave today, let's remember that our faith and our hopes are not a sailboat out in the lake flailing to and fro in the winds. We are anchored on the firm foundation of Jesus and the very promises of God, who has proven Himself to be a promise-keeper. We have a hope greater than those revolutionaries in 1776. We have hope in God, and He never disappoints.