

The God of Hope  
Romans 15:13

We come to verse 13 this morning which closes out this section, and many believe Paul would have been an apt way even to close out the book of Romans. This is the second of five prayers in the closing of this book. The first was up in 15:5-6. And this is such a great prayer for believers. And so challenging and informative. Because we look and many times we say that we just do not know what to pray for our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ? In this fallen world how do we pray for others? Often we pray for their physical needs and that God would supply them or that He would heal so and so from a certain affliction, and then we seem stuck.

And think of it: as I prepared for this sermon the war in the Ukraine with Russia had just begun. How do I pray for believers that are going through such horrors and atrocities? What will give them the strength to endure through all that they will be called to go through as believers in Jesus Christ? As I prepared this sermon the end of the Trucker Convoy had just taken place. People in the church were strongly on one side or the others. We witnessed that many people and believers were divided on their thoughts of the pandemic and the handling of the pandemic. Many families and churches were literally torn apart, with many saying that they would never talk to certain individuals again. How do we pray for believers when hatred toward one another is filling so many hearts and lives? And then there are the personal struggles that we all have individually in our lives as we live in this fallen and broken world, and we struggle with sin and selfishness every single day. How should we pray for ourselves and how should we pray for others?

The prayers of Paul teach us a couple of things. One is obviously what we should pray for others about. But the second thing is what is truly important. We get so off centred that we do not even realize it. We have just gone through the previous section that is all about the certainty of our hope in God. And the amazing thing as we look at this prayer it is all about our God and our relationship with God, and our response to what he has done. And when we realize what he has done and promised, and how indestructible his promises are, that all of his promises are yes and amen in him, then it changes us whether we go through wars or pandemics or persecution or relationship upheavals. So the question here is not only what should I be praying for others, but how does my faith and trust in what God has spoken change the way I respond to the trials and difficulties of life. None of us chooses the trials that we have in life. None of us chooses the history that we are part of or the circumstances that we find ourselves in. And they so are varied and constantly changing, but the one thing that never changes is our great hope in Christ.

We read stories of Christians being persecuted and their attitudes in the midst of that persecution, and it is much like what we read here in verse 13. Many have had sweet attitudes as they reflected on the God of their hope and the certainty of not only what Jesus had accomplished but what God had promised based on the finished work of Jesus Christ. Read of the attitude of Corre Ten Boom or Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the concentration camps. Read of an early martyr like Polycarp or during the reign of Bloody Mary in England the testimony of Bishops Hadley and Ridley. They had this hope regardless of their circumstances. We think that to respond with hope and trust

and praise to God is impossible. It is impossible because of my circumstances. Things change when we start to concentrate and look to our great God and who he is and what he has promised. Our hope really does change us. So whatever your circumstances is your hope in Christ will change you. Are you finding an attitude that the world would not be able to understand but you understand because it is based on God and my relationship with him and the certainty of what is to come? Is it causing you to be patient when you could be bitter, or gentle when you could be abrasive, or loving when you could be harsh, or merciful when we could be self righteous, or forgiving when we could be condemning, or joyful when we could be angry. Hope changes us. Is Biblical hope changing you? Let's go through this verse and see our great God and hopefully through this prayer grow our faith and hope.

1. We need to see who God is. V.13a.

So often we try to conjure up faith in and of ourselves. We try to somehow muster up the strength to put a smile on our faces when the world around us seems to be crashing in. The whole goal of hiding God's word in our heart is for this very purpose - that we would have a different outlook and interpretation of the events of life, and have a different mission in the midst of all of these trial that we call our lives. But the Bible is not just a book of principles. It is the book of God. From the first pages, "In the beginning God," to the end of the book, "come Lord Jesus," it is all about God. It is meant to take our breath away, leave us in awe with the size and grandeur of our God and the enormity of what he has done and what he will do. But our problem is that these truths after hearing them time and time again, which is a blessing, but it is easy to let them become normalized, where they lose that glory that God really has spoken. So when we go through trials and difficulties and temptations we start seeing the enormity of the trial rather than how puny and insignificant the trial compared to our God and his life altering promises that he has made to us that will never be altered.

Think of David facing massive Goliath. Why was he able to face him? Was he just braver than most? No. It was the size and grandeur of God. Listen to 1 Samuel 17:45-47, **"Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand.'"** So often we just do not know who God is, and it difficult to hope in someone we do not know.

So look at who Paul prays to here, **"May the God of hope."** We saw up in verse 5 that God is the God of endurance and encouragement. And we certainly need to endure in the faith and encouragement in our lives. The greatest encouragement and endurance comes from God, from his word. But here we see that God is the God of hope. It is a description of who he is. Hope is the main aspect of this prayer request. We see the word "hope" at the beginning and at the end of the chapter. And notice

what he does not say. He does not say for believers to do their best, or just look on the bright side of life, or try to see the good out of the bad. Those kinds of things might be a little helpful but not for very long. Paul says, “May the God of hope.” the little word “of” is possessive. In other words, hope finds its origin in God. He is the source. Without God there is no hope. A hopeless believer is one that is not looking to the source of hope which is God. You look for hope in any other thing and you will be hopeless.

So how is God the source of hope for the believer? And that is a good question. Let me answer that question in two ways. One is that God is sovereign over everything. There is nothing in this universe that is outside of his control. That is a stunning truth. Do you believe that? Do you believe that everything in the here and now regardless of what you are going through is under his control? All God’s purposes come to pass. God is never frustrated because his sovereign will was not accomplished. It is always done. And the hope that I can have in the here and now with all the events of my life is that his sovereign will is being accomplished. He knows what he is doing. If I just had the horizontal level to look at and not the truths of his word then it would be easy to be hopeless. Isaiah 46:11, **“calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”** God’s will is never frustrated, so we can count on him and hope in him and follow him whatever we are going through.

But also, hope has always a future orientation. We realize no matter what we are going through in the here and now, not only is there nothing that can separate us from God’s love but we have a destiny with God. The reason why we can have the hope of God is because God makes promises. We look at those verses above last time we were together that there is coming a kingdom of righteousness. We take heart because God is a God of all promises that will make his promises come to pass, no matter how great. Listen to the hope that we have in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, **“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”** To lose heart is to lose hope - to want to give up. But we do not. Why? Because we have this hope. Things here no matter how tough are momentary. Things to come which we do not see in the here and now are eternal.

But here is the thing you have to realize in such a hopeless age where people are always trying to find meaning in the things of this earth, or trying to dull their senses through endless activities is that our hope as believers is found not in things, not even primarily found in a destination but found in a person. And the greater and larger and the more glorious you see this God (which is the whole purpose of creation and the Bible) the more our hope grows. You cannot have hope without God and who he is and what he has promised. Again, let me ask you where is your hope?

2. We need to realize what hope produces in the here and now. V. 13b.

This is really how hope changes us. It gives us not only a confidence that God is in control and that there is life after this life that is greater and more glorious because of the person who is there, but if that is our hope it really does change how we will live

and face our fears, anxieties and pressures that we go through in this life. It is incredible to look at these two attributes that really belong together, because most people would say that both joy and peace are by-products of having certain circumstances in your life. Isn't it true? If you look at someone and they have a gloomy disposition and you ask them what is wrong, they will tell you about some circumstance in their lives. If you see someone who is at war or angry and fighting with someone else or is anxious and worrying about something, if you ask them why they will point to some circumstance or what someone else is doing. The reason why I do not have joy and peace is because of this situation or person. If these external circumstances will change then I could have joy and peace.

It is amazing because we think it is impossible to have joy and peace, then we hear of other Christians in the past, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was arrested for his stance against Hitler in Germany. He was a German pastor who for two years in prison made it his mission to be a witness of Jesus Christ and pastor the prisoners there. He was known for his joy and trust in Christ. He was later transferred to an extermination camp, and listen to the peace that he had at the time of his death. This is an eyewitness account, **"The prisoners ... were taken from their cells, and the verdicts of court martial read out to them. Through the half-open door in one room of the huts, I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued in a few seconds. In the almost 50 years that I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."** Where we have placed our ultimate hope and in whom we have placed that hope will change us. Circumstances don't control us, the God of hope does!

So look at this verse once again, **"May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace."** Paul is requesting that God do something that these believers cannot do in and of themselves and that is to fill them with joy and peace. Now think about what he is talking about here because these are attributes that are not natural in and of ourselves. The best we can do is have them momentary and then they vanish. The prayer here is that God would give us the full measure of both joy and peace. It is like a glass filled to the brim and ready to overflow.

That kind of joy cannot you cannot contain. It is the kind of joy that we express and sing about every Sunday. We hear these truths and express these truths. We do not express our joy because it is sunny or rainy but our joy is supernatural because it is found in our relationship with Christ and it is so glorious we have to sing about our great salvation that is wrought by the hands of our great God. When we are at that moment there is no complaining and backbiting but sheer joy that words cannot express, yet the chaos around us is still going on. If that is true then our joy is never in the events or circumstances of our life. It is never that I have a great marriage or wonderful obedient children or a fulfilling job. We might be thankful for these things if they are ours, but even if it is not there is a joy unspeakable because we are justified forevermore in the presence of our God. Worship of God becomes not something we

just do on Sunday morning but becomes who we are. Our worship is to God - our joy is in God. Regardless of our circumstances there is no drab Christianity here, but abundant joy. Does your hope in Christ create an indestructible and inexhaustible joy? You see this in the scenes of heaven. The redeemed throng fall down before the Lamb in great joy and then they get up and do it all over again. Their joy in Christ never becomes old.

And what always goes along with that joy when we hope with God is peace. There are two kinds of peace that are talked about in Scripture. One is peace with God. This is what we find throughout the Book of Romans emphasized. Listen to Romans 5:1, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** We have peace with God. The war is over, and not only do I have peace but we are brought into the closest of all relationships with this God of heaven. We have absolute security with him forevermore. The other kind of peace is the peace of God that really is a gift of hoping in Christ. It is the peace that God gives us regardless of the circumstances we are in. It is the experiential peace that comes in knowing that my God is for me regardless of what the external circumstances might say. As Bonhoeffer went to the gallows there was a peace that accompanied his soul. His God was present with him. He died not as others died. His hope was that even if man kills the body there is one who is Lord over our souls. There is one who has purchased us forevermore.

And it is amazing to see how both these attributes interact through Philippians 4:4-7, and notice how both joy and peace are produced by seeing and savouring and knowing the Lord, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** Here the command is to rejoice in the Lord. It is not an option. If Jesus is who he says he is and has accomplished what he says he did and has promised what he has promised then it is sin not to rejoice. This is the most reasonable thing that we can do. With all the things that we worry about we forget so often that God is near and that we can pray to him. What guards our hearts? The peace of God. If God is who he says he is and he is in control of all things and he has ordained all things for my good and his glory then how could I ever not have peace? It surpasses understanding to the natural mind because they do not know God. We do. Think how relationally or experientially this looks like. Someone offends you, the peace of God controls you. I do not offend back. Things don't go your way, I don't lash out. The peace of God and his promises control me. The kids are having a bad day. I don't yell and threaten, the peace of God controls me. People are against me. I can forgive them. There is never anything in my life of eternal value that is in jeopardy. The byproduct of hope is joy and peace in the here and now.

So here it is: where is hope found? It is found in a person: who he is, what he has done and what he has promised based on what he has done. Are you hoping in him? There is no way that you can lose your hope if your eyes are looking until Jesus. And there is a way that you can know if you are hoping in him. The way we know is that

God's hope produces divine joy and peace in the believer. How much of your life could be described as rest? How much can you lay your head on your pillow and sleep knowing your God has whatever is in your life? How often do we rise in a celebratory mood of the great salvation that has been afforded us in Christ? How often do we celebrate the fact that I get to serve him and make much of him today? How often are we delirious thinking that I will be in the presence of the one I love? Our hope truly does change us to be supernatural witnesses of our glorious God who is the God of hope.