

THE GOD OF HOPE

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Romans 15:13.

Has the world ever held so many broken hopes as it does today? Our fears and our frustrations, our disillusionments and our despairs are piling up mountain-high.

One writer says, "The world is caught in an ebb tide." Another says, "We feel like a prisoner about to face the firing squad of the ages." Then, he adds, "Our hearts are broken, our hopes waning, our morals drooping, our neighbors treacherous, and our science has backfired."

One could go on at length adding link to link in this chain of bewilderment and bafflement by which masses of our fellowmen are bound in this troubled hour. In such a time one thinks of what Thomas Carlyle said decades ago: "For the days that are passing by, even fools are arrested to ask the meaning of them. Few generations of men have seen more impressive days, days of ceaseless calamity, dislocation, disruption, confusion worse confounded. If they were not always days of ceaseless hope, then indeed they are days of utter despair. But it is no small hope that will suffice."

Carlyle was right when he said, "No small hope will suffice." Paul knew that when he wrote his classic letter to the Romans in the first century. It is the large, the lofty and the lifting hope of the gospel of Christ that Paul held out then. If he were alive today, he would still hold out the same gospel of hope.

I. The Title God Bears.

Paul calls Him "the God of hope." The God of the Bible, the One described by the Old Testament prophets and by the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, is not a God of despair, but the God of hope. The character of God is that which guarantees the great hopes of mankind. If God is not dependable, then it is stupid to talk about hope.

What are the great hopes of the human heart?

1. The hope of a Saviour.

Before Christ came, the people of the world yearned for a Saviour. Since Bethlehem and Calvary, that has been the yearning of those who have not been told of the saving power of the Christ.

2. The hope of victory over suffering.

People hope that somehow trouble and pain may serve the higher purposes of life. Multitudes, who are without the light of Christ, are despairing. To them the evils of the world are meaningless. Many do not have any strong confidence with which to meet the ills of life, but they deem it better to whistle in order to keep up their courage than to whine or curse.

Then, there are the shining ones, the children of God by faith in Christ, who are sure that trouble can be harnessed like the mad waters of Niagara River and made to yield power and light and heat in a vast benediction. Accordingly, we hear Paul declare, in Romans 5:4, "We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

3. The hope of future blessedness.

This is another of the towering hopes by which men have been moved through the centuries--the hope of a golden age when health will triumph over disease, when justice will triumph over injustice, and life will triumph over death.

Because God will not disappoint these three hopes, He is given the alluring title, "the God of hope."

II. The Testimony God Gives.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Romans 15:4. The God of hope has communicated to men a revelation of Himself and of His purposes in Christ. If men will build upon that testimony--the Bible--they will never lose the cheerful expectancy, and the zestful outlook, which ought to characterize His children.

How do the scriptures serve as a minister of hope to the children of God?

1. By the instances which they record.

The Bible is full of the red blood of actual experiences in which we see men and women like ourselves plowing through the stormy waters, when it seems that no craft can possibly survive, but coming at last to their desired haven, safe and grateful and exultant.

It tells of a Joseph holding hopefully to his dream even when he was sold into Egypt by his jealous brothers, and moving out at last, through slander and imprisonment, to be the Prime Minister of the empire.

It tells of a Hannah, never giving up her hope of a son whom she might dedicate to God, until, one day, she well nigh died of sheer delight as she presented her Samuel before Eli in the temple and watched him grow into valiant manhood.

It tells of a David, convinced that God had called him to be King of Israel, meeting a hundred rebuffs with unshakable resolve, and marching on, humbly but confidently, to the throne for which he was destined.

It tells of a Simeon, wrinkled and half-blind with age, praying daily that he might live to see the coming Messiah, surviving by a sweet providence until one day the infant Jesus was laid in his arms; whereupon he reached up for the ear of God and whispered that he was ready for the chariot to swing low and take him home.

God's Word is a storehouse of illustrations making vivid the victories of hope across the lengthening centuries.

2. By the insights which they furnish us.

For example, if a man does not know the Bible, he is likely to feel that hope is something that springs out of hopeful happenings or circumstances. What is that man going to do when circumstances are hopeless? On the contrary, the man who knows his Bible realizes that true hope is never grounded in physical conditions but in spiritual relationships. He understands that it is never a matter of moods and feelings, but rather of ultimate facts and shining duties.

III. The Trust God Asks.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." The secret of the hopeful heart is all wrapped up in this phrase of two words: "in believing." Unbelief shuts out the God of hope. Unless you put your faith in Him, He cannot put His hope in you.

1. Joy in believing.

Paul prayed that they might have a permanent joy. He wanted God to fill them with all joy. Joy is one of the essential elements in a Christian's experience. Joy is the immediate result of being rightly related to God. There is no joy like unto that of knowing that your sins are forgiven, that you are born again, that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus, that you have already passed out of death into life, and that you will never come into condemnation.¹⁸ There is therefore now no

condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." How could one be anything but happy with that kind of an experimental knowledge?

Christ did not come as a joy-killer, but He came as a joy-bringer. He did not come to take anything out of our lives that is worthwhile. He came to contribute joy to our lives. When the eunuch believed on Christ and was saved, Philip baptized him. Then the Word of God says, "And he went on his way rejoicing."

"At the cross, at the cross, where I first
saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day."

2. Peace in believing.

Joy is the active side of the Christian experience and peace is the passive side. When we are saved, we not only have peace with God, but we are at peace with ourselves. He does not leave us with any accusing sin festering in our consciences. He not only forgives, but He cleanses and removes our sins from us. This fulness of peace comes through believing on Christ.

We sorely need hope and the courage which accompanies it. Hope is allied, not with weakness, but with strength; not with baseless speculation, but with a firm grasp of fundamental truth; not with fond and foolish fancy, but with the most solid loyalty to righteousness. Hope is the dominant note of Holy Writ. Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of hope.

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name."

If you are not a Christian, I beseech you to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, your Counselor, your Leader and your Guide. If you will do that, and follow Him, then you will have a joy and peace and hope which no one can ever take from you.