

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

Isn't that a wonderful benediction? Paul has concluded that doctrinal portion of his epistle to the Romans when he comes to this text. All that follows this verse is something like a postscript we add to our letters, very personal and very interesting.

How crowded this text is with beautiful words! And the words are names for beautiful things without which no outward form of loveliness could long charm us or serve to make earth delightful. What a radiant assembly of jewels! It would scarcely be possible to bring together in one sentence a larger company of resplendent words, -- "God," "hope," "joy," "peace," "believing," "power," and "Holy Spirit." Where, outside the realm of religious literature, could you find another such sentence, a sentence of less than thirty words, singing to you of Faith, Joy, Peace, and Hope? A prayer encompassing these spacious benedictions must have been issued from a very exultant spirit, and one deeply acquainted with "The unsearchable riches of Christ."

Throughout the epistles of Paul, the Christian life is emphasized under such figures of speech as riches, wealth, fulness, and abundance. The Bible speaks of the exceeding abundance of the joy that is unpeakable and full of glory -- "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It also tells us of the peace that passeth understanding. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." These and other verses signify that the ideal Christian life is a life of depth, of fulness, and of power. If Christian people were living that kind of a life, we would be living in a vastly different world than what we are.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit." So runs the epilogue or peroration of Paul's letter to his friends in Rome. Here he sums up his counsel in the prayer that, whatsoever else be theirs, they may abound in hope; and he rests his prayer upon the knowledge of what God has been doing for them and preparing for them all along, and of the joy and peace which may, therefore, rightfully be theirs. Paul desired for the Romans the most delightful state of mind, and the greatest blessings possible. What are the blessings for which he prays?

I. Joy.

Not a scintillating, transient happiness but a permanent cheeriness. To be filled with joy is a rare delight. The fulness spoken of here is a fulness of joy. "Now the God of hope fill you 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. The Scripture calls it the joy of salvation, that is, the joy 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, that you are not come into condemnation, for, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." How could one be anything but happy and glad with that kind of a knowledge?

If I should ask, "Why did Jesus come to Bethlehem more than 1900 years ago?", someone would likely say, "Why, He came to make atonement for sin -- to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Truly, the first public designation of Jesus Christ is made by

John the Baptist, who said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world." Primarily and essentially He came to be the Saviour of man.

You will recall that in His conversation with Nicodemus, among other things, He said that God had not sent Him into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. On the various occasions when He dealt with individual cases, He did not condemn them. He came to a world that was condemned already; the trial was all over, the verdict was rendered, and the sentence was passed, which was death upon all men. Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save all those who would believe. On another occasion He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He came not only that we might have abundant life when we cross the river and live with Him in heaven, but abundant life right down here while we are on our way to heaven. He not only came to save our souls, but to save our minds, our bodies, and our lives. He never came to destroy our lives, but to save them.

At another time He stood up in the little synagogue in the village where He had been brought up. Likely His mother was in that audience. Maybe that was the first sermon she ever heard Him preach. When He stood up before the people assembled there, He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

In the light of these and other statements of purpose that Jesus made, no one can truthfully say that He came to kill our joys or to take anything out of life that was worthwhile. Jesus did not come as a joy-killer; He came as a joy-bringer. He came to contribute to our joys and not to pale them.

In the eighth chapter of Acts we have the record of the Ethiopian eunuch reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and Philip interpreting the same to him. As a result, the man believed on Christ and was saved. Then Philip baptized him. Then the Word says, "And he went on his way rejoicing." That is how people go on their way when they accept the Lord Jesus.

"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."

II. Peace.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." You see, joy is the active side of the Christian experience, and peace is the passive side. The Bible teaches that the natural man is estranged from God, his heart is at enmity against God, "it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." 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 thank God, He cleanses, He removes our sins as far from us as the East is from the West. God cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the true and living God. Is it not a wonderful thing that God found a way whereby He can forgive a sinner and also cleanse him? This fulness of joy and of peace comes through believing.

III. Hope.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope." The Bible is the book of hope, God is most magnificently hopeful. We sorely need hope and the courage that accompanies it. Hope is not a matter of mere sentiment or of a happy temperament. It 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. From first to last the Bible is one unbroken, persistent call to hope -- to look from the past and the present to the future. Hope is the dominant feature of Holy Writ. Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of hope.

Joy, peace, and hope are all graces. Joy is a gift of God, peace is a gift of God, and hope comes from God. The God of hope is the author of our hope, and Jesus Christ is the very foundation of it. He inspires the hope. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

"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."

We should ever remember that there is a difference between the meaning of this word hope in the Bible and the modern use of it. The world's idea of hope is hopefulness. But our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. And that is the gift of God. Can't you see this glorious truth? And it is wonderful to know that you can have this joy and peace and hope in spite of the conditions about you.

If you are not a Christian, I beseech you to accept Jesus Christ as your 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.