

"THE GOD OF HOPE"

"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.

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 dropping, our neighbors treacherous, and our science has back-fired."

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." "No small hope will suffice" for anyone.

Language seems inadequate to set forth all that God is to believing souls. The Apostle piles epithet upon epithet so as to express the thought which wells up in his mind. In verse five Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation." I trust that many of you have found Him to be just that. In verse thirty-three He is called "the God of peace." In verse thirteen Paul speaks of Him as "the God of hope."

Our text is filled with beautiful words. These words are names for beautiful things without which no outward form of liveliness 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 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."

The Christians at Rome were a miscellaneous group. Some were Jews, and others were Gentiles. Some of them lived amid the squalor of the ghetto; some were slaves; others were free; but none of them were prosperous or great in the eyes of men. They did not have much for which to hope, but Paul wrote them about "the God of hope." Paul 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 great hopes of the human heart?

1. The hope of a Saviour.

Before Christ was born the people of the world needed a Saviour. Since Bethlehem and Calvary that has been the need of those who have not been told of the saving power of The Christ.

2. The hope of victory over suffering.

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."

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 expectance, 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.

"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. "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 came into this world to be the Saviour of men. He came to save our lives as well as our souls. He also came that we might have an abundant life while we are on our way to heaven.

On one occasion Christ appeared in the synagogue in Nazareth. Likely His mother was in that audience. Maybe that was the first time she ever heard Him preach a sermon. He said to those assembled, "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. The Bible says, "And he went on his way rejoicing." That is how every Christian should go on his way.

"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.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and 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 conscience. He not only forgives, but He cleanses and removes our sins from us. This fulness of peace comes through believing on Christ.

3. Hope in believing.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope." We sorely need hope and the courage which accompanies it. Hope is not a matter of mere sentiment or of a happy temperment. 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 note of Holy Writ. Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of hope. God is the author of hope, and Christ is the dispenser and inspirer of hope. Paul said, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27).

"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 away from you.