

## Romans 4:25-5:11 – The Hope of the Glory of God

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### Introduction

The passage that I have chosen to preach on has been on my mind for a couple of months. Or, to be more precise, it is a particular phrase from Romans 5 that has been on my mind and which is central to what I want to share with you this morning. That phrase is found in Romans 5:2: "we boast [or, we rejoice] in the hope of the glory of God." It is the phrase, "the hope of the glory of God" that I want to focus on. This was Paul's boast. And he expected this to be the boast of the Christians in Rome as well for he does not say "I boast ..." but "we boast ...". And so, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, this should be our boast also.

### The Meaning of this phrase

But what does Paul mean by the phrase "the hope of the glory of God"?

Paul is arguing that this is the wonderful hope possessed by the Christian. This is the treasure which we have laid up for us and which will one day be ours – "the hope of the glory of God."

By this phrase I believe that Paul means firstly that the Christian possesses the hope of being brought one day into the very presence of the living God, the creator of all things, and seeing or gazing upon God in all his glory. This is a prospect that transcends our imagination.

Do you remember that when Moses had ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God, the mountain had been shaking and smoking with fire at God's presence? But then, in Exodus 33, Moses makes an extraordinarily bold request of God; "Show me your glory", he says. Do you remember the Lord's response to Moses?

You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live... There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen. (Ex 33:20-22)

Moses was not permitted to see the fulness of God's glory. Yet when he came down from Mount Sinai his face shone with the reflected glory of the living God. Even a glimpse of the receding glory of God left its impress on the face of Moses. Wow!

But now Paul tells us that we who have come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ have the hope that we will one day see the living God in all his glory – a radiance that far exceeds that of any created thing such as the glory of the sun – even though you cannot gaze directly at the sun for any length of time without damaging your eyes. What an extraordinary and fearful hope.

But I am convinced that there is even more to this hope as it is expressed by the Apostle Paul – something even more wonderful than the hope expressed by Moses – the hope of seeing God in all his glory. I believe that Paul is saying that the Christian not only has the hope of *seeing* the glory of God but also of *sharing* in that glory. A few chapters further on Paul says in Romans 8:16-18:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also *share in his glory*. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Do you notice what Paul says here. Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father. He has been clothed again with the fulness of the glory of God that was his before the world began (John 17:5). He is referred to by Paul as "the Lord of Glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). The glory of God is seen fully in the face of Jesus Christ. And we are co-heirs to this glory. Present sufferings fade into insignificance, says Paul, compared with "the glory that will be revealed in us". Note that Paul does not say "the glory that will be revealed *to* us", though that would have been glory indeed, but the glory that will be revealed "*in* us". We too shall possess this glory; the glory of God that is possessed again by the risen and ascended Christ is the glory that we shall share as co-heirs with him – we shall "share in his glory".

These are promises that defy our imagination, and yet I believe that there is one more element to this "hope of the glory of God." Because of Christ's death and resurrection we have the hope that the day will come at his return when all of creation shall be made new and will be filled with the manifest presence and glory of God. Let me refer you again to Paul's words in Romans 8:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:18-21)

Creation itself will share in "the freedom and glory of the children of God" – "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

This is the tremendous hope of the Christian. It is an extraordinary hope. It may even seem an extraordinarily arrogant hope. How can we dare to entertain such a hope?

## **The Ground of this Hope**

What I want you to see with me this morning is that this is no mere wishful thinking on the part of the Apostle Paul.

Our hopes are often disappointed. Nora Ephron was the author of award-winning Hollywood romantic comedy films such as, *When Harry met Sally* and *Sleepless in Seattle*. She had a string of awards to her name. She died from myeloid leukemia in 2012. But in her essay "Considering the Alternative", written in 2006, she says, "The honest truth is that it's sad to be over sixty. The long shadows are everywhere – friends dying and battling illness. A miasma of melancholy hangs there, forcing you to deal with the fact that your life, however happy and successful, has been full of disappointments and mistakes, little ones and big ones. There are dreams that are never quite going to come true, ambitions that will never quite be realized." (Nora Ephron, *I Feel Bad About My Neck*: Transworld, p. 128.) Most of us have had hopes we have cherished, hopes that have been dear to our hearts, but which have not been fulfilled and which we recognise with regret will now never be realised.

But this hope is quite different. It is a sure and certain hope – a hope that will not and cannot disappoint – and I want to show you why.

This hope is grounded in Christ and in his saving work – that is why it is the hope of the Christian, the hope of the person trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul writes of the Lord Jesus, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins – he died for our sins. Our sin had separated us from God – how can an unholy people have communion with a holy God? Jesus, God's Son, came into this world to identify himself with us – he was like us in every way but was without sin. He came to take our place – to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He took upon himself the burden of our sin and guilt and endured the punishment that our sins deserved. He died the death that we should have died that we might be freed from condemnation. The price for our sin is paid, paid in full.

He was "raised to life for our justification." Jesus' resurrection from the dead and his ascension into glory at the Father's right hand is the demonstration by God that his atoning work was accepted by the Father – that he is the Beloved Son with whom God is well pleased. He may be mocked and condemned by the Jewish leaders, jeered at by the crowds and crucified by the Roman authorities who mocked him with a placard over his head, "The King of the Jews." He may be ignored and despised by many today who think that they have risen above the childish superstitions of religion; but he is justified by God. God the Father has placed his seal of approval on his Son by exalting him to the highest place in all the universe and giving him the name which is above every other name. And Jesus has gained this place in glory on our behalf – he died "for *our* sins and was raised to life for *our* justification" – that we might know and be assured that we are beloved Children, welcomed into the presence of the Father. We are no longer held at arms' length but are embraced and welcomed home.

Look at how Paul develops this theme in Romans 5:6-10. He is determined that his readers in Rome and that we, his readers today, should thoroughly understand this point.

Jesus died for us, say Paul, when we were "powerless", "ungodly" (v.6), "sinners" (v.8), "enemies" of God (v.10). There was nothing in us that made us deserving of God's mercy or that merited Christ's death for us. On the contrary, we were hopeless cases, intent on going our own way in opposition to God and on living to please ourselves. We were quite powerless to reform ourselves or to make ourselves commendable to God. This is something that Paul, previously Saul the Pharisee, had come to understand. This is precisely why Jesus came into this world and gave himself for us – precisely because we were hopeless and helpless rebels and sinners.

Here indeed is the most wonderful truth: God the Father loved us in all our sin and rebellion and sent his Son into the world to save us; Jesus loved us when we were lost in sin and gave himself to save us – he loved us when we were sinners. He loved us not because we deserved his love but when we deserved his judgment.

Listen carefully then to Paul's argument in vv 9-10. "Since we have now been justified by his blood," – His blood cleanses us from all our sin; we are forgiven, made acceptable to God, embraced and welcomed by him. And all of that was done for us while we were enemies of God (v.10). So then, "*how much more* [now that we are beloved members of God's family] shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" We can have certainty concerning the future. Now that we have been "reconciled to [God] through the death of his Son", and now that Christ lives for us in glory and pleads for us at God's right hand, we can be certain that no-one can ever pluck us from God's hand and that we also shall be brought safe to glory.

We can have certainty that all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will be welcomed into the presence of the living God when they are taken from this world by death. You may feel yourself to be deeply unfit and unworthy to stand in the presence of God, but no purgatory is required, no probationary time of cleansing and preparation. No other cleansing is required other than that provided by the shed blood of Christ. On the day of our death, the dying Christ will say to each of us who believe in him what he said to the dying thief who looked to him in faith as he died on the cross, "*Today, you will be with me in Paradise*".

We are justified – accepted by God; approved by God; embraced by God; accepted in the Beloved.

We are justified by *faith*. But it is not our faith that justifies us. Our faith is like a trembling and feeble hand that reaches out to Christ from a knowledge of our own unworthiness. It is like the hesitant prayer of the tax collector in the Temple who dares only to ask, "God be merciful on me a sinner." This is the one, says Jesus, who went home justified. It is not about the strength of our faith; it is all about the sufficiency and perfection of our great Saviour.

The solid ground of our "hope of the glory of God" is Christ's atoning work and risen power. He is now exalted in glory and he is there on our behalf. Trusting in him we can be sure that we will one day see that glory – the glory of God in the face of Christ – and we shall *share* that glory. And we can be confident that at his coming, all creation shall be filled with his glory. This is the sure and certain hope of the Christian, as sure as the fact that Christ has died and that Christ is risen.

### **Being Assured of this hope**

But you may still feel that you need more assurance than this. You are convinced that Christ died for sinners and that he rose again, but how can you be sure that he died for *you* and that *you* are and will be welcomed into the presence of God?

Firstly we can be certain of this hope of glory because we are trusting in Christ. Christ himself is our assurance and faith lays hold of him and makes him *our* Saviour and *our* righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

But secondly, the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with a sense of God's great love for us (v. 8). The Spirit assures us that we are beloved children of God for Christ's sake. He assures us that we are embraced with a love that will never let us go, a love that is stronger than death. The Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste of the glory to come.

We have a hope that is underwritten by Christ's death and resurrection and which is personally assured to us by the Holy Spirit's witness in our hearts – a signed love-letter from the living God, addressed to us personally and assuring us that we are his beloved children and will never be abandoned by him. We have a "hope of the glory of God" – a hope that fills us with a sense of joy and peace. Christ in us is our hope of glory.

A week or so ago I heard a report on the sad death of a student at Bath Spa University who had contracted meningococcal meningitis. One of his tutors, speaking of the tragedy of his death said, "He *had* a bright future ahead of him." Each of us will also face death, unless the Lord Jesus returns before that day. But, even in the day of our death it may still be said of us, "he/she *has* a bright future ahead of them" – we have "the hope of the glory of God."

### **The practical consequences of this hope.**

Having this hope, with its sense of joy and peace, will – or should – change the way we live; it should transform the way in which we respond to circumstances.

You may have noticed that the wording of Romans 5:2-3 differs even in various versions of the NIV. In my 1984 version it reads "we *rejoice* in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also *rejoice* in our sufferings..." Other renderings of the verb Paul uses here are "boast" or "glory in..." But here I want you to note with me that having a sure and certain hope of the glory of God enables us to rejoice even in the face of sufferings.

In Romans 8:18 Paul writes, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul had experienced much suffering in his life but he has been able to rejoice even in the midst of his suffering because of his inextinguishable hope in the glory of God – he could even sing praises to God when chained up in a dark and dirty prison cell. Paul writes, "suffering produces endurance". This is not the natural consequence of suffering; suffering more naturally causes resentment, bitterness complaining and despair. But suffering experienced with the hope of the glory of God gives perseverance – the determination and strength to press on towards the hope that is set before us.

And this perseverance in the face of suffering produces character. Many of us know remarkable characters: Christians who have faced years of suffering and debilitating illness in a spirit of hope and of joy, rather than being characterised by grumbling and complaining.

Take, for example, the life of Joni Eareckson Tada. A diving accident led to her being paralysed from the neck down at the age of 17. Though for a couple of years Joni experienced depression and doubts, for many years now she has spent her life serving the Lord and bearing witness to the reality of God's strength being made real in the midst of weakness.

To what extent is your character being formed by the sure and certain hope you have in Christ? What difference does it make to you when you face difficulties and disappointments?

### **Our witness to this hope**

The life that is lived with a constant eye to the hope of the glory of God, acts as a powerful witness to the world around us. Such lives bear witness to the fact that a supernatural power has laid hold upon our lives and is at work within us. The power that was displayed in Christ's resurrection from the dead is now at work in the lives of those who have put their trust in him.

As we mentioned, the word "rejoice" can also be translated as "boast", and that is how it is translated now in the NIV in 5:2 and 11: "we boast in the hope of the glory of God... we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." We boast of the hope that is ours in Christ. We boast of our God and of what he has done for us in our precious Saviour.

In other words, we are glad to tell others of these things.

In a world that cannot see beyond the horizon of tomorrow – a world around us that is preoccupied with the coming election and the outcome for Brexit – we have a hope of the glory of God. We have a hope that is centred in Christ: that is underwritten by things that happened 2000 years ago; that is written onto our hearts today by the Spirit of God and that will last into an eternity to come; a hope that the day will come when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as

the waters cover the sea This is the hope that shapes our lives and transcends every passing circumstance.

Here is a hope for a world in despair – a world that has seen its hopes shattered and has come to the end of itself. Here is a hope that will not and cannot disappoint.

Make this hope your boast and your testimony so that others may be drawn to faith in Christ and may come to possess this same hope for themselves.

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Christ Church Downend – 17/11/2019

Whiteshill Evangelical Church – 24/11/19