



Text: Romans 8:18-27¹

Series: Right Living – God’s Righteousness Transforming Our Lives

Title: Part 11 – “Hope,” God’s Bridge to the Future

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In an article entitled, “Wise Christians Clip Obituaries,” Gary Thomas tells the following story.

“As vice-president, George Bush represented the United States at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev’s widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev’s wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband’s chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might have mercy on her husband.” (Christianity Today, October 3, 1994)

Death is but one reminder that the world is not the way God intended it to be. The world is full of many other reminders: disease, famine, earthquakes, crime, heartaches, disappointments and broken relationships of all kinds. Hope in another life beyond this is our fortress against despair -- Mrs. Brezhnev’s action declared that hope, not death, would have the last word.

Helen Gougeon, a writer with the Toronto Star, met Josee Verville, a 15 year old student from Victoriaville in Quebec on a train trip from Montreal to Toronto. Over the next few years, Helen stayed in contact with this bright and energetic young lady, exchanging Christmas cards and keeping in touch with her progress through university. Then, in 1987, no Christmas card arrived. Early the next year a note came from Josee’s mother, telling Helen the tragic news that Josee had gone to bed on December 4th in good health, but had died in her sleep from a cerebral hemorrhage. Helen wrote back a letter of condolence which included some lines of poetry: “Death is not extinguishing the light, it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.”

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“Can a mother believe that about the death of a beautiful daughter who was 22 years and 4 months old?” Helen wrote in the Toronto Star. “Surely, I said to my brother who has four beautiful daughters of his own, surely Josee’s brief life is our assurance that there is a place where the whys of our lives will be answered one day.” (“A young life sadly cut short,” The Toronto Star, February 6, 1988)

Hope is the bridge that God has given us to carry our spirits from the fallen world of death and disease, famine and earthquake, crime and heartaches to the world where things are fair and good and right.

If we can learn to live in hope, we can live in the fallenness of this world without despair because we know that something better lies ahead.

Is it possible to learn how to live in this world so that our spirits are not crushed by tragedies and frustrations?

The passage we have before us this morning boldly declares that hope is possible in the middle of our fallen world. Paul states emphatically...

**“But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”
Romans 8:25**

How can we learn to hope with patience? In Romans 8:18-27, Paul shares some of the secrets of learning to live in hope in the midst of a fallen world.

First of all, we need to see that...

Hope is a bridge from suffering to glory

The central lesson here is that we can live with hope in a world gone wrong if we have a clear and confident vision of what will be.

Hope, in one sense, is an expression of discontent with what is and a confident declaration of what will be.

Paul declares with confidence...

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:18

How can he possibly say this? What a bold statement to make! Paul didn’t just say that when he stacked up his present pains and afflictions against his future prospects that they just didn’t measure up as something he would worry about! What he also said was that “our” sufferings pale in comparison with the glory that will be revealed in “us.” Paul was speaking for “us,” not just for himself. Paul wants you and me to make the same declaration.



Paul was no stranger to suffering. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 Paul lists the things that had happened to him in the course of his ministry: imprisonment, beatings, stonings, being left for dead, hunger, rejection, stress. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 he recounts the story of his "thorn" in the flesh, "a messenger of Satan" that tormented him in his body. Paul knew the emotional pain of remembering his past actions as a persecutor of the Christian faith -- actions that had cost the lives of people he now considered his brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul knew suffering. His statement here was not a naive, sweeping assertion of ignorance.

Paul knew the real source of the problem with life -- the continuing presence of sin. Until that source of suffering was removed, life would never be what God had created it to be -- completely satisfying and rewarding.

Paul was never fooled into believing that life in this world was going to be heavenly! Paul had "trouble-proofed" his hope! Some preachers will tell you that you can have glory right now -- Paul says it's still coming! Continuing suffering in the present didn't discourage him because he knew where heaven was -- in the future, not the present!

As many of you know, Billy Graham suffers from Parkinson's disease. He was asked how the discovery of this disease had affected his faith. He wrote that when he accepted Christ as a young man, *"it was not because I believed He would take away all my pain. No, I trusted Him because He promised me eternal life, and I believed He would always be with me and give me the strength to cope with the difficulties of this life... Whenever any preacher or teacher of the Word oversells either the material or the spiritual benefits of the Christian life, I believe he is contributing to the work of the horseman who deceives. There is nothing on earth to compare with new life in Jesus Christ, but it will not always be easy."* (source unknown)

Christian hope is an expression of discontent with the ongoing influence of sin in the world. Sin brought "suffering" of all kinds into the world:

death and disease,
famine and earthquake,
temptation and rebellion,
crime and assault,
cruelty and pride,
selfishness and hate.

What gives Paul the ability to make his confident declaration that the present world is not worth comparing with what will be is that he has a clear picture of the future world firmly planted in his mind.

Paul was not hoping for what should be, or what ought to be or what could be -- he had a firm, faith grip on what will be.



The Bible never spells out in detail what “the glory” will be, but this passage suggests two important parts of the picture in Paul’s mind.

First of all, the glory is that...

**“...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption”
Romans 8:21**

Paul referred to himself as being trapped in “this body of death” (Romans 7:24) Our bodies become tired and hungry, they grow sick, they age and finally, they die. One day, when Christ comes to either transform us or raise us from the dead, we will receive glorified bodies that will never wear out -- we will be able to enjoy "eternal life."

Secondly, the glory is that...

“...the creation itself will ... obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Romans 8:21

We will no longer be afflicted by our sinful impulses. We will experience a "glorious freedom." (C.f. the NIV) Eternal life that was continually subject to the power of sin would be nothing more than a living hell! We will experience liberty and freedom, peace and joy, love and truth, gentleness and patience -- all for eternity!

The first lesson Paul teaches us about living with hope in this world is this...

We can live with what is when we have a clear and confident vision of what will be

How’s your vision of what God has in store for you?

Secondly, we need to see that...

Hope is a bridge from longing to fulfillment

The lesson here is that...

We can live with hope in a world that’s gone wrong because we can be sure that what we hope for is worth the wait!

Christian hope is not just an escape from a world gone wrong. To borrow and twist a phrase from an old song, that would be to "accentuate the negative and eliminate the positive."



Christian hope is also a longing for fulfillment. Paul tells us that...

“...we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8:23

God has begun a work in us. And God, who began his good work in us, will continue to perform it until it is brought to completion. (Phil 1:6)

The Holy Spirit in us is God’s guarantee, his seal (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14), that He will finish what He has begun – the redemption of our bodies. We will be completely freed from sin and our decay -- we have God’s word on it in us!

Last week we talked about the truth of the “indwelling Spirit of God” that Paul teaches in the early verses of Romans chapter 8. Our helper, the Holy Spirit, “dwells” in us (Romans 8:9, 11) because we are “in Christ.” (Romans 8:1, 9-10)

The Spirit has been given to us to help us live godly lives, but he’s also given to us to assure us that the work God began in us will be completed. Listen to what Paul said to the believers in Ephesus about the Spirit’s work in those who are “in Christ.”

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14

Paul uses **three analogies** or word-pictures **to describe our longing** to see the completion of the process that has been begun in us. **Our longing is like...**

... **waiting for the birth of a child.** For months a mother feels her child growing inside her and every movement of her baby increases her desire to see her child born. What sustains a woman during the agony of labour is the anticipation of finally seeing and holding her child. The process produces a worthwhile result -- the joy of a newborn child. In a similar way, Paul wrote that...

“the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now...[and] we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait” Romans 8:22,23

New life has been begun in us, but the process is not yet complete! We long for full, free life!

On this Mothers Day, let me give appropriate praise and recognition to all those mothers who bore months of waiting and then endured the “pains of childbirth” so that all of us could be here this morning. I’ve had the privilege of being at the



birth of all three of our children and all I can say is that the human race would have been a short sprint if childbirth had been left to men! I know it's worth it – but, wow!

Paul refers to **waiting for the harvest** when he wrote that...

“...we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait...” Romans 8:23

The “firstfruits” of the harvest season were the produce of the early harvest that promised the fuller and richer final harvest yet to come. During the months of planting, watering and tilling, the farmer’s anticipation of the harvest grows as he watches his crop mature. What sustains him through the long days of harvest is the anticipation of seeing his crop come in. The process produces a worthwhile result -- the joy of a good harvest.

Thirdly, Paul refers to **the process of adoption**.

“...we ourselves, ... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8:23

During the frustrating months of legal negotiations and interviews, the prospective parents have their minds set on a child who could be theirs. What sustains them during the process is the anticipation of seeing a child added to their family. The process produces a worthwhile result -- the joy of a new family member.

Some years ago, some close family members went through the long process of adopting a two year old boy from Romania. The process was long, frustrating at many points and expensive! But all the work and all the waiting was worth it. In fact, I now have a niece and nephew both of whom were adopted from Romania and I am very proud of them!

In each of the three analogies that Paul chose to use, the process is difficult, but the end is worth waiting for! The anticipation of the great joy that comes with the result keeps those involved moving forward.

So often in life, our anticipation is not matched by reality. What we eagerly hope for turns out to be less than worthy of our anticipation. Anticipation is what Christmas Day is all about. The preparations, the dreaming, the hoping, the anticipation of the gifts -- but once the gifts are opened the anticipation is often not matched by the reality. But in the case of our glorious future, the anticipation won't even come close to the wonder of the reality we will experience.

Paul encourages us to drink deep in the joy of anticipation of what is going to come to us because we can be assured that what we will receive will be beyond



whatever we could ask or think! It will be worthy of our most extravagant anticipation.

It will be worth the wait!

Finally, we need to see that...

Hope is a bridge from weakness to sufficiency

Paul encourages us with the truth that...

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” Romans 8:26

The lesson here is that...

We can live with hope in a world that's gone wrong because we're OK until our hope is complete.

We're OK because God takes care of us.

Paul has told us that the Holy Spirit in us gives us a longing to be completely redeemed and made new. Now he tells us that the Spirit comes to our aid and helps us to cope with the frustrations attached to living in this world that is groaning and waiting for redemption.

God does not leave us alone. He doesn't dangle a glorious future before our noses, like some heavenly carrot, expecting us to make it there on our own strength. God knows our weakness and so He comes to help us.

In our weakness, in the effect of sin on our minds and spirits...

“...we do not know what to pray for as we ought....” Romans 8:26

We don't know what to pray for or how to pray for it. We don't know whether we should pray for healing, for jobs, for finances, for “world peace” -- you name it and we just don't know! We wonder if it's God's will. And when we've finally decided what to pray for, we struggle with the words to use. But the powerful truth of Paul's teaching here is that by the time we figure out what to pray for and how to pray for it, the Spirit has already dealt with it for us.

The Spirit knows the will of the Father -- he only asks for things that the Father will bless. The Father knows the mind of the Spirit -- before he even needs to groan out the request, the Father already knows what we need.



Jesus assured his disciples of this fact. When he was teaching them about prayer he told them not to rant and rave like the pagans who think that a lot of religious words impresses God to answer.

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Matthew 6:8

Often I'm struck in my own experience of God's goodness by how many times God fulfills the promise of His words in Isaiah 65:24...

**“Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.”
Isaiah 65:24**

Some years ago when we were serving in another church, Ruth and I were looking at our budget for the coming week and as usual, there was more month left at the end of our money. We wondered out loud to each other how we were going to make it through until pay day. On Monday afternoon, Ruth went to the mail box and "lo and behold" she spied a brown envelope with red writing -- our income tax return had arrived, beating all previous records for speed! Then we talked with Ruth's dad. He, too, had received his return and had put some money in our account. Our need existed in the mind of God long before it existed in ours -- the answer to our need, our tax return and Ruth's father's return, was already on its way by the time we even realized our need to ask.

Ruth said to me, "You know, we need to remember this day whenever we're tempted to doubt God's provision for our needs." She was right -- we need to put these memories of His provision in a "Bank of Hope" and draw on them when things seem bleak. We should name the account, "Already covered."

When we're sick of dealing with trouble in our lives and a friend comes along to take over some of our chores for us without even being asked -- fixing meals, paying bills, driving kids to the doctor, repairing our roof -- how do you feel? Your spirit is renewed, your hope is rekindled. Well, God does the same thing for us time and again!

Our hope is sustained and supported by the help of the Spirit!

As I close, let me tell you a story about someone whose life was sustained by the kind of hope we've talking about this morning. In 1993 Doug Nichols was told by his doctor that he had a 30% chance of recovery from colon cancer surgery. The estimate was that he had about 3 months to live, a 70% chance of dying.

“Well,” Doug said to his doctor, “let me tell you something. Whatever happens, I have a 100 percent chance of going to heaven.”



While Doug was undergoing chemotherapy, he and his wife Margaret were gripped with the news they were watching on TV. The news coverage of the Rwandan civil war depicted carnage beyond belief. The refugees who flooded into Zaire created severe humanitarian relief problems and a cholera epidemic had broken out. Doug & Margaret felt that they should do something.

Knowing that he was dying, they went and helped a Rwandan Christian friend of there's with relief efforts. Doug's friend had hired 300 Rwandan stretcher-bearers to help transport the sick to medical help.

One day Doug's friend said to him, *"we have a problem."*

"What is it?" Doug asked.

"I was given only so much money to hire these people, and now they want to go on strike."

...

"Well, can I talk to them," Doug asked.

"It won't do any good," his friend said. "They're angry. Who knows what they'll do."

Doug stood on the steps of an old school building and 300 hundred angry men surrounded him. Speaking through an interpreter he said:

"I can't possibly understand the pain you've experienced and now, seeing your wives and children dying from cholera, I can never understand how that feels. Maybe you want more money for food and water and medical supplies for your families. I've never been in that position either. Nothing tragic has ever happened in my life that compares to what you've suffered. The only thing that's ever happened to me is that I've got cancer."

"Excuse me," the interpreter interrupted, "did you say cancer?"

"Yes."

"You came over here? Did your doctor say you could come?"

"He told me that if I came to Africa I'd probably be dead in three days."

"Your doctor told you that and you still came? What did you come for? And what if you die?"



"I'm here because God led us to come and do something for these people in His name. I'm no hero. If I die, just bury me out in that field where you bury everybody else."

The interpreter began to weep. In that culture, cancer is an automatic death sentence. Then he turned to the crowd and told them, *"This man has cancer... He came over here willing to die to help our people and we're going on strike for money. We should be ashamed."*

The men went back to work. And because Doug had placed his hope in Christ, thousands of lives were saved and many heard the gospel. Doug wrote... *"What did I do? Nothing. It wasn't my ability to care for the sick; it wasn't my ability to organize. All I did was get cancer. But God used that very weakness to move the hearts of people."* (from Doug Nichols, "In My Weakness," Servant Magazine, Spring 2001)

That's the kind of hope that builds a bridge from weakness to sufficiency. It's hope that is rooted in the sufficiency and power of God. And because it's rooted in God, it's the kind of hope that says, as Paul did...

"For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10

It's a hope that gives us the strength that comes from the confidence of "a 100 % chance of going to heaven."

Do you have that hope? Do you have that confidence? Do you have that strength? You can. Knowing that his disciples faced the turmoil of an uncertain future, Jesus said to them...

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas [a disciple] said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:1-6

Jesus didn't give us a map to hope – he is our hope! Trust in him.

- **Prayer**
- **Final Song:** The Solid Rock ("My hope is built on nothing less...")
- **Benediction**