

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE
Romans 15:13

Intro: My text is a prayer--one of the shortest prayers which is recorded in the Bible. But it is, nevertheless, one of the most important prayers of the Bible. A prayer, or a message, does not have to be long to be important.

One thing that makes it important is that it comes at the end of one of the most important books of the Bible: the book of Romans.

Another thing which makes it important is that it deals with one of the most important subjects in the Bible: our hope.

Now anyone who studies the Bible will soon learn that Bible words often are enriched with a meaning that they do not have in our everyday speech. For example, when we use the word hope we express a desire which is uncertain. We say that we hope that the weather will be nice. Or we hope that we will be able to see someone dear to us this summer. A young man has been calling me recently who is hoping that he will be able to find a job in work which he has been trained to do. There probably are certain things that you hope to do this coming week.

There are times in the Bible when the word hope is used in this way, but this is not the way that it is used in our text, nor is the main way that it is used in the NT.

Paul does say in Rom. 15:24, "I trust to see you in my journey" (the word "trust" being the Gk word for hope in the original), but the 14 other times that he used either the noun or the verb hope in this book he was expressing another idea.

While we use the word to express a desire which is uncertain, the writers of Scripture speak of a hope as a certain future expectation. It is something that a Christian looks forward to, which he has not yet realized, but it is just as certain to come to pass as anything that he has experienced in the past.

For example, turn back to Rom. 8:24, 25. (Read.) Notice that v. 24 begins with the word, "For." (Read v. 23.) And see where Paul was headed in his thinking as you read on down to vv. 28-30.

See also Col. 1:5. And read also what Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 4:13 and Tit. 2:13 (read v. 12 with it).

Go back to Rom. 5:2.

These all have to do with the future, and they are all designated as the hope of a Christian, the hope of a child of God.

What is it?

I. WHAT IS OUR HOPE?

It is the promise we have that some day we will be with the Lord, that we will behold His glory, that we will be completely changed into His likeness, and that all of creation will be renewed. See Rom. 8:20, 21.

This is what keeps a pastor going. See 1 Thess. 2:19, 20.

This word hope teaches us that we should be living with this glorious future ever before us. We need to be eagerly anticipating the time when we will be with the Lord--however that time may come! It is then that the purpose of our salvation will be fully realized--to be with the Lord, and to be like the Lord, and to leave behind forever all of the trials and weaknesses and sins which plague us in this life!

A second question:

II. WHERE DID THIS HOPE COME FROM?

The answer is very clear in our text: it came from "the God of hope." It originated with God as the goal of our salvation. This word "hope" describes the purpose of our salvation. To us belongs the glorious prospect, the certain hope, that we will be like Christ. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God . . ." (1 John 3:2). Cf. Phil. 3:20, 21. See also Rom. 8:29, 30.

Read Rom. 11:33-36 with this in mind because this is what Paul had in mind--all of the glorious truths of our salvation!

A third question:

III. WHY IS IT MENTIONED HERE?

What had Paul been doing in the verses immediately preceding our text? In fact, what had been one of his major points of emphasis throughout this Epistle?

He had been quoting verses which had to do with the salvation of the Gentiles; he had been showing that salvation for the Gentiles was just like that which had been provided for the Jews. And Paul wanted them to rejoice in that prospect. The heathen religions of the Gentiles offered nothing like this. They had no assurance. They had no such a prospect. But every Christian does have it. And Paul wanted them to rejoice in it.

But let me ask still another question, a fourth question:

If it is absolutely certain,

IV. WHY THE PRAYER?

Why was Paul praying about it?

Well, you can see by reading this brief prayer that Paul was not praying that their hope would finally be realized, but he was praying about the attitude of the Roman believers from that time until their hope was realized! It is not a truth that we should ignore. It ought to be uppermost in our thoughts every day that we live. But the sad fact is that it is not that important to most Christians.

Do you want to learn to pray the way you should? Then study carefully the prayers of the Bible. And it would be hard to find a better starting-point than with this prayer. Perhaps one reason the spiritual life of the Church today is on such a low level is because there are so few of us who are praying this prayer for each other, and for ourselves!

You see, we, living in this world, are so much in danger of living like the world lives, that we need the work of God in our souls through the Holy Spirit to turn our thoughts heaven-ward and the hope that is before us!

Do you remember what Paul said in Col. 3:1? "If (or, Since) ye then be risen with Christ . . ."

You sometimes hear it said that Christians are so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthly good. Do you know any like that? Show me a Christian like that, and I will show you a Christian who is of the greatest earthly good!

Now a final question?

V. WHAT DOES THE PRAYER MEAN?

Being a prayer, it means, first of all, that . . .

- A. Only "the God of hope" can enable us to live with this hope ever before us, influencing our lives at every point.

That is the reason we pray, isn't it? It is because we want God to do for us and for others what none of us can do for ourselves!

And so we pray to "the God of hope."

But the power, the dunamis, of the Holy Spirit is also required.

We think of the power of the Holy Spirit in many differ-

ways, but hardly ever like this. You and I can never live like this without the Spirit's help, and His help is obviously given in answer to prayer.

Note a second thing about this prayer.

B. The degree in which we anticipate such a hope.

Notice the words:

- 1) "Fill you."
- 2) "With all joy and peace."
- 3) "That ye may abound in hope."

Every Christian will respond when asked that he is looking forward to the coming of the Lord, that he is looking forward to being in heaven with the Lord. We believe that He is coming, and that heaven is going to be so much better than this life that there will be no comparison.

BUT, do the words of Paul's prayer really describe us? The word "fill" suggests that believers manifest their hope in the Lord in different ways, and to different degrees.

The meaning of Paul's prayer suggests that this should be an every-increasing anticipation of our hope. The longer we know the Lord, the more we should be living with this fulness, this abounding in hope, with all joy and peace.

But notice a third thing about this prayer:

C. The obstacles to such a life.

Paul mentioned three things of a positive nature, all of which have their alternatives. They are:

- 1) "Joy."
- 2) "Peace."
- 3) Faith -- "believing."

What is the opposite of "joy"? It is unhappiness, sorrow, discouragement, and perhaps other things.

What is the opposite of "peace"? Turmoil, unrest, etc.

What is the opposite of faith? Unbelief, worldliness, human works.

Our trials often get severe. Unanswered prayers are a problem to us. There is so much in the world to keep us in a constant state of unrest. Faith seems so foolish

at times, and we are often disappointed.

Is it really possible for us to live like this? Was Paul's prayer realistic?

Yes, it was--and it is! Let us note finally . . .

D. The God-given means for such a life.

I will mention three:

1. God Himself: "the God of hope."

If God, out of the goodness of His heart, designed this for His glory and for our good, does it not seem more than possible that He would make this the greatest delight we have in our hearts, the joy of all joys?

Is He not able to do this for us?

2. The Holy Spirit.

Is there any limit to His power? If we would only quit trying to do the work of the Godhead in our own souls, we would experience more of the blessings which They have for us.

3. The Word of God.

Where, you will say, do you get the Word of God out of this verse? Well, it is certainly implied by the references to "the God of hope" and "the power of the Holy Ghost." But look back to v. 4, and see what Paul said about our "hope" in that verse.

This is one reason we have our Bibles, to keep this hope ever before us. Read in the OT and the NT and you will find that this "hope" was that which kept the people of God going in past days. Read a chapter like Hebrews 11. Read the book of Job. You find it in many of the Psalms. This is why the Apostles could face death with joy and peace in their hearts --to depart and to be with Christ was "far better." Cf. Phil. 1:23. Cf. Rom. 8:18.

Concl: I am fully convinced in my own mind that, if we would faithfully pray this prayer for each other, that the answer of God would bring about such a revival in our own souls, and such blessing in the lives of others, that we would experience blessings we never could have dreamed of. The Church would enter into its greatest effectiveness, and the world would be awakened to see that God is indeed with us.