

Third Sunday after Pentecost  
Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2026  
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*Romans 5:1-11 – Hope*

You and I probably use the word 'hope' on a daily basis. We say it for simple things, like, "I hope I'll get time to catch up with my friend this week." Or, "I hope I can keep this pot-plant alive." On a more serious note, we could be hoping for a positive result for some medical tests; or we're hoping that a strained relationship can be restored. Today's reading from Romans uses the word 'hope', but it has a different meaning to our everyday usage.

Ordinarily, hope is an expectation of uncertainty: we *hope* that something will occur, but we don't know for sure that it will. We *hope* it won't rain on our picnic, but we can't be certain with the unpredictable nature of weather.

Biblically, hope is the opposite: it's a confident expectation, a moral certainty, not just a desire. There's no shrugging our shoulders and offering up a feeble smile like we do with worldly hope. We're more likely to be sporting a big grin with a fist pump: Yes! My hope is in Almighty God!

In Romans, Paul begins his approach to Biblical hope by talking about having peace with God. When we repent of our sins and accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we *have* this peace. Since the sins we carry are transferred to Jesus when we put our faith in him, in exchange, his righteousness is given to us. We are justified by our faith in him. If you struggle with the word 'justified', one commentator explains it like this: When we're justified, it's "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. (Justified...*just-as-if-I'd* never sinned?) Yes, praise the Lord, that is both amazing and humbling! So, now we are at peace with God.

However, being at peace with God does not imply the absence of suffering. In John 16:33 Jesus says we will have peace through him, but in the world, we will have trouble. The good news is, in Christ we have something the world doesn't give us – and that's hope. The world's idea of hope is that it's something you must generate yourself. Somehow, you

have to conjure up hope, maintain it, keep it alive – all by yourself. And even then, this thing I'm calling worldly hope, is only an *uncertain desire*, not a confident expectation.

But the hope that Paul is talking about is not a mental attitude. It's a spiritual reality. It's not something the world can give you. We can only gain it through Jesus; it's what *he gives us*. Hope is a firm reliance on God. It's a 'happy certainty'. Many of you may know the lines of the hymn: "My *hope* is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness...On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

In Romans, Paul goes on to show how hope is born out of suffering. He even says we 'glory in our sufferings'. That brings us up short; no one wants to suffer! Therefore, we need to look closely at Paul's words. He shows that the path to hope is not a direct one, because suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. Let's take that one bit at a time.

Our stepping stones to hope begins with peace with God, and progresses through the stages of suffering, perseverance, character, then hope. If we truly are at peace with God, having genuinely repented and accepted Christ as our Saviour, then we should approach our trials – our suffering – as Job did. He didn't blame God, he didn't listen to the improbable explanations his friends tried to offer, he acknowledged how humans are limited in their understanding, and he learnt that you can't control the uncontrollable. When we're faced with suffering, we have a choice: we either become hardened of heart and play the blame game (especially wanting to blame God), or we become humble and persevere.

In the same way that Paul says we should 'glory in our sufferings', James (1:2-4) also tells us we should feel joy at suffering. Both men are telling us we should not look upon such circumstances as a curse, as punishment or as a calamity. This is how the world views suffering. Instead, our suffering should press us *into* the Lord. We can then persevere and press *on* in the Lord. Perseverance is choosing to go on trusting, praying, leaning on Jesus no matter what your day looks like.

In contrast to this, the evil one wants us to be either angry or despairing, to give up and *not* persevere. He wants you to believe it's your fault that

you're in a bad situation, and that God is punishing you. He wants you to *not* experience the hope God has for you. Compare this to Paul and James: the joy in suffering they are talking about comes from the fact that God will never leave you nor forsake you. Those reassuring words come from Hebrews 13:5.

So, in persevering, we develop character. The Bible may not mention character, but it frequently mentions the qualities that make up character, such as humility, honesty, sincerity and integrity. We gain these qualities of character through suffering. As we experience trials, our negative tendencies and faults are exposed. Whether we were unaware of these traits or we've just tried to ignore them, suffering tends to bring them to light; and we need to purge them as we persevere and keep trusting in God. With his help we can get rid of our fear, anxiety, anger or whatever negative attitudes and feelings we are harbouring. With perseverance, we are leaning more and more on God. He is our sure hope. The reason we have hope is because God loves us. He has poured out his love into our hearts. In Ephesians 3:18, Paul talks about the height, length, depth and breadth of God's love. This gives us confidence to say, in any situation, 'God's got this. God's got *me*.'

Rather than engaging in futile wishful thinking or uncertain desire, we have a confident expectation and sure certainty that our loving God will fulfil his promises. Each of us must bind God's promises to ourselves so that we have a spiritual anchor for our souls, providing stability and strength during difficult circumstances. Psalm 42:5 is a picture of the soul arguing with itself. It begins with the question: "*Why are you discouraged, my soul? Why are you so restless?*" The response it gives is: "*Put your hope in God, because I will still praise him. He is my saviour and my God.*"

Hope, then, is not just worldly wishful thinking that leaves us high and dry in times of trouble. Biblical hope becomes an everyday focus. Biblical hope gives us peace as we rest on the certainty of God's promises for us, his love, compassion and mercy.

Paul's words of Romans 15:13 provides us with an appropriate prayer to finish on: "*May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" Amen.