

Sermon Notes, April 3, 2016

Hope Changes Everything, Romans 8:18-27

We live by hope. We are by nature *hoppers*. There are a lot of things I don't know about every person here this morning, but I know one thing—every person has hopes. Paul says, *“In this hope we were saved.”* He's not just talking about hope in general. The kind of hope we're talking about today is not just “wishful thinking.” It's not just optimism that something I hope is going to happen will turn out the way I want it to. Hope is the conviction that because God has invaded this world in the person of Jesus Christ, the best is yet to come for this sorry, dark world and for you and me. I don't know if it's ever been expressed more powerfully than by Paul: *“I consider that our present sufferings (Paul understood about sufferings) I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”* It is this hope that kept Paul going in the face of overwhelming problems. It is this hope more than anything else that enables individuals, and marriages, and families, and churches to endure and prevail.

On the day when hope is lost, a person begins to die. It's as if some kind of spiritual fire goes out inside a person's heart, and from that day on they're just marking time. Let your hope die, and you will miss the adventure that God intends your life to be and all your dreams will die before you do.

Paul says in this hope we're saved. And he says we have to keep hoping in God because of another truth about the human race. Many times we have hopes that don't pan out. Paul's word for this is “groaning.” Groaning is what people do when their hopes are frustrated and they're disappointed. Paul says, *“The whole of creation has been groaning from the fall right up to this present time.”* And not just groaning, Paul has a real striking metaphor. He says it's been groaning *“as in the pains of childbirth.”* (v. 22)

It is a striking thing to me that Paul includes himself and his brothers and sisters in Rome amongst the groaners. Sometimes people think that becoming a Christian ought to mean that I'm exempted from disappointment. Paul says that having the Spirit doesn't mean we're exempted from groaning, not in this troubled world. But what he says is we groan with hope. He says as we groan, we wait eagerly, with inextinguishable perseverance.

Dallas Willard writes, *“One of the remarkable changes brought on by Jesus and His followers into the ancient world concerned the elevation of hope into a primary virtue. Hope was not well regarded by the Greco-Roman world.”*

The Greeks believed that hope was a set-up for disappointment.

Jesus completely changes everything! Paul said from a Christian perspective, the ability to face the future with great confidence does not ultimately rest on your ability or the strength of your character, or the level of your giftedness. It does not rest on you at all. Paul says our hoping is part of a larger pattern. He says, *“the creation itself is waiting in eager expectation for things to be set right.”* He says he knows the focal point of all this hoping and groaning and it all goes back to one day.

It goes back to Jesus. Jesus was filled with such an unshakeable confidence in His Father that they all invested their lives and their futures into His hands. And then He was killed. When He died, their hope died with Him. They thought it was the end and they groaned—until they heard this screaming from over the fence. A bunch of Roman soldiers said: *“This rabbi—we arrested him, we tried him, convicted him, sentenced him, stripped him, mocked him, whipped him, beat him, hung him on a cross to crucify him. He died two days ago, we buried him—and now he's back!”*

When Paul says *“in this hope we were saved—”* this is the hope he's talking about. Hope based on this Jesus who died for our sins, and was raised again for our eternities. He gave us His Spirit so you and I could become *hoppers*.

So how do you keep hope alive? How do you become a hoper? Oddly enough, the first thing you'll need is a problem. Paul puts it like this: *Hope that is seen is no hope at all.* (v. 24)

There are three habits that *hoppers* cultivate.

1. Hoppers learn to let anxious feelings prompt them to pray—groan to God.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

Hopers learn to let anxious feelings prompt them to pray. So when concerns crop up it is possible to think thoughts like this: If I don't get what I want here I'll never be happy. If I don't succeed at this project, I'll always be a failure. I'm afraid about finances.

I'm afraid about my health... That will rob you of life. It will cause you to live in regret about the past, anxiety about the future, preoccupation in the present. God never calls anybody to that kind of life.

Paul says it is possible to bring those concerns to God and give them to Him and then say, *“God—let your kingdom come into this situation.”*

Focus your beliefs/thoughts around things like: I believe that because of Jesus, the resurrection is a settled fact, so nothing can separate me from the love of God, I believe that God's Spirit is at work in me and is my great partner in life and therefore no effort that I make to honor and follow God is ever in vain.

2. Hopers learn to become very clear about what they're in control of and what God's in control of. Jesus put it like this: *“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?”* (Matt. 6:27)

The reality about your life is there's nothing you're in control of. The illusion of control can be very intoxicating, but you don't even control your next breath. You don't control the next beat of your heart. Maybe you've been trying to control somebody in your life: Kids, marriage, somebody you're worried about, a relationship, a boss, a co-worker, someone in the church, or the church itself. And God's saying to you: *“Just let it go. Would you just quit worrying about this little project of your life; quit obsessing over whether people think you're a success—just let it go. Give it to Me.”*

I really need to comment on v. 26. It tells us how the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. And that we don't know what we ought to pray for. That certainly characterizes my life too much of the time!

But here we see that verse 26 assumes the Christian life is a continual experience of weakness. We've been touching on this throughout the sermon. It doesn't say the Spirit takes away our weakness. It says the Spirit is going to help us *through* our weakness. The Spirit is not going to save us *from* our weakness; it's actually going to save us *through* it.

Look at verses 15 and 16. *“And by him ...”* By the Spirit ... In verse 15 it says the Spirit tells us we're children of God. The Spirit brings a spirit of sonship. The Spirit is the one who convinces your heart of the gospel, and the gospel is not that I earn my way into heaven, but rather, I receive adoption into His family freely. I become an heir. I'm not a hired hand.

That's in verse 15, but look at verse 16. In verse 15 it says the Spirit taught our spirit to cry, “Father.” The Spirit convinced our spirit, convinced our heart, convinced us, we are children of God. Now look at v. 16. It says, *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”* This should most definitely give us hope!!

The last thing I want to tell you and the most important point of all:

3. Hopers learn to make a really wise choice about where they put their ultimate hope.

Paul says, *“There is a hope that does not disappoint...”* (Romans 5:5)

In this world, hope disappoints all the time. In this world we groan. So what's your ultimate hope? What's your real, bedrock hope when all your other hopes don't pan out?

Because this man Jesus Christ came to this earth and lived a life and groaned with us, and died on a cross for our sins, He paid the debt we couldn't pay. Then because three days later He didn't stay dead, and what you celebrated last weekend really did happen and word started to spread, *“He's back, He's back, He's really back!”*

From that day on, hope became inextinguishable. For anybody who put their trust in Him, made Him their Savior, the Forgiver, the Lord of their life, they started hoping. If you've never done that—I hope you will. There is no other ultimate hope worth investing your life in. I hope you make that choice. I hope you tell someone here about it.