

God of Hope

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[0 : 00] kind of thinking help us down here? The whole point of this great theology is to create a new community in a world like this. Gospel doctrine creates gospel culture, and one unmistakable evidence that the gospel is landing on us wonderfully is, as we saw this morning, when we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us for the glory of God. That's verse 7.

Another unmistakable evidence that the truth of the gospel, the truth about God in the gospel, is getting traction among us, is this spirit of hope in verse 13. A radiant spirit of hope resting upon a church in this world of despair. A community of hope is living proof that the gospel of Christ is not only true, but also beautiful and life-giving. And who wouldn't love to be in a church like that? So here in Romans 15, 13, we find the second mark of gospel culture. A community of hope in a world of rage. Now, as I said earlier, we're a mess in the United States of America these days. The words that I hear people using to describe us are words like divided, angry, extremist, exhausted, polarized, polarized, and so forth. We could take all those words and add many more. And Romans 15, 13 is perfect for all of us in times like these. When our earthly hopes grow dim, our gospel hope shines the more brightly. Jesus said,

I am the light of the world. Why did he say that? Because we're always living in a dark age. He also said, You are the light of the world. Why did he say that?

Because Christianity is not for people already living pretty good lives who'd like to upgrade from maybe six to seven or eight on a scale of one to ten.

Christianity is Christ the light shining in our darkness. So that we, even we, by his grace for his glory alone, even we begin to reflect something of his light in this world. And our Lord above does not need favorable trends here below for his light to get through. He has, as we've said, all authority in heaven and on earth. And we belong to him.

[2 : 58] Right here, right now. So Romans 15, 13 paints the picture of a church together as a community flourishing as their world falls apart. Flourishing because a higher world is coming down among us, inviting all around to come in.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. We Christians, we face life as it is. And we also rejoice in hope. The pronoun you in this verse is plural, as we'd say in Nashville. I don't know if I mentioned this this morning. Do you know the plural of y'all is all y'all? Do you know that? Okay, so here, it's a plural you in the original text here in this verse. So we would say, now may the God of hope fill all y'all with peace and so forth. This is a shared hope. This is a community of hope.

This is a spirit of hope. This is a spirit of hope which is such an intangible, but in a community it becomes visible.

You and I want that. We want our hearts not freaking out, but strong with hope in God.

We don't go to church for a mere lifestyle upgrade as we waited out for retirement, decrepitude, and death.

[4 : 48] We want nothing less than Christian salvation and Jesus himself to become real to us. Jesus and all of us together as one, as a community.

Right here at St. Silas. Romans 15, 13 is in the Bible to guide us into those green pastures and beside those still waters.

So let's think it through together. Three wonderful insights. My dad was a pastor. I stole tonight's outline from my dad. So I have to own up to my dad. Very clear, very true to the text. One, who God is. Two, what God does. Three, how God does it.

Okay? So first of all, who God is. Nothing could be greater. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and so forth.

What has Romans already taught us about God? Chapter 4. He gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist.

[6 : 00] He calls... When you and I came to Christ, we brought no strength to the table that he was hoping for. He called into existence an openness to himself, a faith in himself that we did not have.

Who can stop a God like that? Chapter 6. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. He's got loads of it.

Loves to give it away. The more he gives away, the happier he is. The free gift of God. Chapter 8. He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

The gospel, the Christian gospel, is not about the immortality of the soul. The Christian gospel includes within its scope the resurrection of the body, the humblest part of us.

And he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal body through his spirit who dwells in you. You will rise again. And y'all are going to be amazing.

[7 : 17] You will be recognizable as you. And you will be like the risen Christ.

Your body will be incapable, not only incapable of death, incapable of fatigue. In a sparkly new universe that the Bible calls the new heavens and the new earth.

The Bible says, this sacred gift given to all the redeemed, this great company of believers whom no one can number from every tribe, tongue, nation, and so forth.

You will go through eternity meeting fascinating new people and everyone will like you.

I want to live in that world. Jesus said, I go to prepare that place for you. Here's another verse in chapter 8. Will he not graciously give us all things?

[8 : 31] If God gave us his only son in his life, death, and resurrection, is God, as we would say in America, is God going to start nickel and diming us now?

Is God going to hold back now? Having given us his son, is that what we should believe about God? He's reluctant? After sending his son? How does that make sense?

Will he not freely give us all things? Every single one of us is going to live a life in this world and some things are just not going to work out.

And we don't freak out about that because we're looking into the future and he who gave us, gave up his only son for us, he will give us all things.

Here's another one from chapter 8. It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?

[9 : 34] Sometimes I condemn myself. Maybe you too. In my thoughts. I think, what a wretched loser you are. What? You did that again? You said that again?

Ray, you're supposed to be past that by now. Condemnation. Condemnation. And actually, I have a pretty good point because I do some bad things.

Right? Okay. But if God justifies, who is to condemn? So now you and I have something to say to our self-condemning thoughts.

Now we know how to talk back to ourselves. It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? My goodness, the God of hope. And then, of course, chapter 8. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Things present, things to come. I love that phrase, things to come. Friends, by God's grace for his glory at 7.23 p.m. Greenwich time?

[10 : 38] Is that? Okay. 7.23 p.m. Greenwich time. Not August. What is this? March? March 26th in the year of grace, 2023. Let's decide now.

By God's grace for his glory, we will stop fearing the future. Things to come will not separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Things to come will only be delivery systems bringing more of the love of God into our experience. Bring it on. And what, this is who God is.

He's the God of hope. And what he wants to be to you. What he wants to be to you is the God of hope. So, this thought we have inside.

I mean, God is a morally serious person, right? Why shouldn't God just despise me? Why should God pay any attention to me? Look at me. He's probably tired of me by now.

[11 : 49] Those thoughts, we lay them aside. We receive the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ covering us, covering our worst moments, our worst regrets.

And that blood of Christ on the cross declares we can receive and have God in his fullness of grace forever. Even with our weaknesses and shortcomings.

Especially in our weaknesses and shortcomings. What else can it mean that God is the God of hope? Why would we hold out on him?

Why would we hold out on him? The Bible also says he's the God of peace. The Father of mercies and God of all comfort. The God of all grace. So, this is not the way God is disposed toward us in mercy and grace.

This is not a 51-49 calculation on God's part on a good day. This is just who God is. This is who God is. Way down deep at the most profound substratum of his being.

[12 : 50] The God of hope, of peace, of mercies, of comfort, of grace. It's who God is. And who God is more important to us than who we are.

We never know what tomorrow will bring. But we know who God is. He declared himself in Jesus, so now we know. Even for us, the undeserving, he is the God of hope.

Isn't that the whole point? Well, let's just dare to believe it. Let's not fearfully think, what if? Let's think with gentle confidence, even if.

The God of hope is not pushing against any door that doesn't want to open.

He's not nervously working on plan B. Nothing can defeat his purpose of grace and glory. For everyone who receives his son with the empty hands of faith.

[13 : 55] The God of hope is tonight inviting you to be sure of him. Come what may.

It's who he is. Secondly, what God does. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's what God does. He fills us with all joy and peace so that we abound in hope. Now obviously, God is not, it's very clear from life and the Bible, God is not promising us a zippity-doo-dah joyride.

Not in this world. The Bible's most realistic book in the world, Jesus said, Blessed are those who mourn. The Psalms include many laments as a form of worship. So this word abound must mean this.

That in all our losses and sorrows and tears and so forth, to our own surprise, we just keep bouncing back. Our faith takes a beating.

[15 : 05] And we're lying there on the ground bleeding, wondering if this is the end. And to our own surprise, we get back up again.

And we face life again. We take the next step. We just go do the next right thing, whatever it might be. Abounding in hope looks like resilience.

We keep bouncing back by God's grace for his glory. I'm really struck by the bold wording here. It sounds almost like an exaggeration. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace.

All joy and peace. What's the word all doing there? Do you guys have 31 flavors ice cream in Britain? Is that chain? You do? Oh, you don't?

Oh, this is a problem. 31 flavors ice cream is the best. So you walk in, you have 31 choices, right? All manner. So it's like 31 flavors of joy and hope.

[16 : 06] Because so many life situations call for a particular experience, a particular kind or form of joy and peace. When your moment comes when you desperately need joy and peace, God will have the kind of joy and peace for you in that moment.

And you can turn to him and say, Father, at this moment right now, I hate my life. Would you help me right now?

Isn't that moment what this verse is for? Lord, get me through this. Lord, get me back.

Lord, this is horrible. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace that you abound in hope. Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Christian who suffered in that Nazi concentration camp, came out of it saying, There is no pit so deep, but Christ is deeper still.

And you and I, when the Lord has told our full story, you and I are going to dance on the grave of every sorrow we ever suffered.

[17 : 36] And we are going to party forever. And right now when we suffer, we remember that. And we go take the next step by faith in God.

So the gospel won't let us tell ourselves, the Christian gospel won't let us tell ourselves, Joy and peace? Nah. I'm not like that. I'm just not like that.

Hey, come on, guys. Who of us is like that? We're talking about a miracle here. We're talking about the power of the Holy Spirit. We're talking about the gospel coming in and creating new realities in people who aren't like that.

The gospel is all about what only God can do. When the God of hope gets involved in our anguish, our capacities are no longer the point.

His capacities are the point. And God wants to make that prophetic statement to our world of despair through us today. In fact, it's why we suffer. God is giving us the privilege of serving as living proof that he can get anybody through anything.

[18 : 47] And our suffering world needs to see that in us. Then they might put their hope in Christ as well. I read a fascinating book about ancient Rome by an Italian archaeologist.

And he said, this is astonishing to me. He said, the apartment buildings of Rome, they had no city codes, right?

So the apartment buildings of Rome were just thrown up by whoever in whatever manner. And they were so poorly built, so shoddily built, that he wrote, quote, The city of Rome was constantly filled with the noise of buildings collapsing, and the tenants of an apartment lived in constant expectation of its coming down on their heads.

Those wretched buildings, that's where the Christians lived. That's where they raised their families. That's where they had their house churches.

Ancient Rome was not gleaming marble and flowing togas and lavish banquets. It was horrible, especially at night. But God gave to them then, and God gives to us today, a sacred power to overcome the world, a future forever, together, that nothing in this world can destroy.

[20 : 16] This world didn't give it to us, and this world can't take it from us. The risen Christ above, right now, at this moment, has plenty of joy and peace and hope to share with every one of us all the way to the end and on into eternity.

We believe that. Okay. How do we get traction, especially when we need it, to live in this hope, this joy, this peace?

How does this actually happen for people like us in a world like this? That's point three. Number three, how God does it. Who God is, what he does, how he does it.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So there are two parts of the how question. There's our part in believing, and secondly, there's God's part by the power of the Holy Spirit. So let's look at our part. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

[21 : 21] What does that mean? It means we treat God's promises in the gospel as true and relevant right where we live our lives.

They don't become true when we get that ideal life we're wishing for. In life right now where we are, God has spoken. When the faith in my heart and Bonhoeffer helped us understand this, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and this is why it's so great to be a community of hope together, because when the faith in my heart grows weak, there's a pretty good chance that faith in your heart will be strong and we can come together and sort of cobble our resources together and something wonderful detonates.

And we live again. So we pool our faith and we keep stumbling forward together. Christians are stumblers. Thing is, we just stumble toward Jesus.

We stumble forward. In isolation, we lose heart. Looking to Jesus together, we make surprising progress over time.

My son, Gavin, a pastor in California, told me about an older lady there, a saintly figure in the church there, who told Gavin about her own griefs.

[22 : 46] She said, God never tells me, get over it. What he says is, give it to me. The words in believing are talking about that.

It's saying to him, Lord, my heart is broken and I'm weak and I give my broken, weak heart to you.

Now help me. That's in believing. What then does God do? What is his part? The power of the Holy Spirit. There are different Christian understandings of the power of the Holy Spirit.

But all of us agree on this. Every one of us knows, I need a miracle way down deep. Who of us hasn't experienced the miracle of hope, the miracle of joy, the miracle of peace, courage, strength.

And we knew this far exceeds myself. This is not me. The Lord is helping me. I wish we had time to just have an open mic up here at the front.

[24 : 00] I wish we had time for so many of us to come forward and just briefly tell stories of how God met us when we hit rock bottom. How God gave us hope when we had nowhere else to go but look to him.

It would be so powerful, so moving. God gives this mercy, the power of the Holy Spirit, to the undeserving, like me, like you.

Because he purposes and offers to lift us up and carry us all the way to that place Christ has prepared for us. So we want to reject every false hope and move all our chips over onto his square.

Let me close with this true story. 1851, there was a ship at the very southern tip of South America, Tierra del Fuego, not far from the Antarctic, and there were British missionaries on that ship.

They were there in that bitter, cold bay to await the supply ship that was to rendezvous with them there. Something delayed the supply ship.

[25 : 17] They all died of cold and starvation while they waited. The supply ship eventually arrived. One of them, Richard Williams, a Methodist lay preacher, wrote this in his journal.

Poor and weak though we are, our abode is a very Bethel to our souls, and God we feel and know is here.

And several weeks later, I think this may have been his final entry, he wrote, Should anything ever prevent my adding to this, let all my loved ones at home rest assured that I was, listen to this, that I was happy beyond all expression the night I wrote these lines and would not have changed situations with anyone living.

That's Christianity. That shouldn't happen in a world like this, with weak people like us. But it keeps showing up because God has made a commitment.

The God of hope is with us all the way. He is committed to you.

[26 : 47] He is committed to you. Trust Him. Trust Him. Trust Him.

He will keep you. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.