

## 12. Hope for eternity

June 29, 2008

Hope is a funny thing. You can not see it, you can not smell it, you can not touch it. You can not buy it. But without it, you can not go on not even one day.

Many people go to work with some aspect of hope that it would be a better day than yesterday. If we are not allowed to have hope in our lives, there would be a massive suicide everywhere because of despair.

Hope is a vital thing we need for survival whether it is physical or spiritual. January 6, 2006, in Sago, West Virginia, as Martin Toler Jr. huddled with 11 fellow miners trying to shelter from poisonous air in one of the farthest reaches of the Sago Mine, he took an insurance form and a pencil from his pocket.

In faint sentences of farewell and religious conviction, he let his family know that death, as it approached, came gently.

"Tell all - I see them on the other side," Toler, a 51-year-old mine foreman, wrote. Nearby were the words, "It wasn't bad, I just went to sleep." And at the bottom, "I love you."

I don't know whether Martin Toler was saved or not. But when he wrote this note, he lost hope physically and emotionally.

Physical hope is not as crucial as spiritual hope. The spiritual hope can only be achieved through knowing Jesus Christ as the personal Savior and Lord.

In Romans 5:1-5, Paul assures us that our hope in God will never disappoint us. Heaven is not wishful thinking – it's a certainty. It's backed up by a God who always keeps His promises.

The great Reformer Martin Luther said about chapter 5 of the Book of Romans in this way, "In the whole Bible there is hardly another chapter which can equal this triumphant text."

### A. THE GRACE WE STAND

*Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

The Bible doesn't say we should have peace with the devil, peace with the world, peace with the flesh, or peace with sin. We must have peace with God if we want to be in heaven.

Did you know that while we were unbelievers, we were at war with God because we would not follow God's law? God declared us sinners, which was a declaration of war. Justification means that God declares us righteous, which is a declaration of peace, made possible by Christ's death on the cross.

You may say, "I thought the Bible said that there is no condemnation." That is absolutely true, but you have to read the rest of the verse.

*Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

The Lord our God removed His condemnation from us when we came to Him through Jesus. If you don't have Jesus in your heart as the Lord and Savior, it means that you are not a born-again Christian. From what we just learned, you are still condemned by the law and you can not have peace with God.

The Jews were kept from entering into the Holy of Holies in the temple. The Gentiles were kept out by a wall in the temple with a warning on it that any Gentile who went beyond would be killed. But at the moment Jesus died on the cross at the ninth hour which was three o'clock in the afternoon, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from inner court of the temple was torn from top to bottom to give an access to the presence of God for the Jews and the Gentiles who put their trust in Him.

"Peace with God" takes care of the PAST: He will no longer hold our sins against us. "Access to God" takes care of the PRESENT: we can come to Him at any time for the help we need.

"Hope of the glory of God" takes care of the FUTURE: one day we shall share in His glory!

What does it mean "*this grace in which we stand*"? Many Christians begin their Christian journey with God's grace without work. But as they grow in the Lord, they start to think that they have to go on to perfection and maturity by dealing with God on the principle of law through their work.

Let me give a few thoughts regarding "*this grace in which we stand*":

- I don't have to prove I am worthy of God's love
- God is my friend
- The door of access is permanently open to Him

Does it mean we can do whatever we want to do and still have grace of God with us? First of all, if you really receive the saving grace of God and if you are standing in His grace, you would not want to do anything to displease Him with you sin. You would do right things because you love God, not because you need to earn His brownie points. By the way, God does not keep the brownie points at all.

So what kind of mindset should we have?

- To be certain of God's future favor – yet to be ever more tender in conscience toward Him
- To rely on God's chastening hand as a mark of His kindness

## **B. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER**

*Romans 5:3-4 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

Just because we accepted the grace of God and received Jesus in our hearts, it doesn't mean that we would have trouble free lives. As humans live together, there are problems among us. Now in addition to our normal trials and troubles, satan hates us because we decided to follow Jesus. You didn't actually think that satan would sit on his hands and cheers you, "Atta boy, you go and follow Jesus, hoorah!"?

*John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

But for the believer, trials work for him and not against him. No amount of suffering can separate us from the Lord. Instead, trials bring us closer to the Lord and make us more like the Lord. Suffering builds Christian character. Please note how the sequence goes:

Tribulation > Patience > Proven character > Hope

Our English word "tribulation" comes from a Latin word 'tribulum'. In Paul's day, a tribulum was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing the grain. The tribulum was drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff. As we go through tribulations, and we depend on God's grace, the trials only purify us and help to get rid of the chaff.

There are many parallel verses in the Bible for trials and tests. Let's go to James 1:2-3.

*James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

Rejoice in tribulation? Are they losing their minds? Maybe they got tortured one too many times and it was affecting their brains. It doesn't make any sense to say, "count it all joy when you fall into various trials". Joy and tribulation seem like oil and water.

When we endure suffering in faith, we learn perseverance. Persevering, in turn, produces proven character – character that has passed the test, so to speak. Then character brings forth hope that reminds us in this way, "because the God who is developing our character in the present can be relied on for the future, too." Yes, we can trust Him all the times. That brings hope and joy to our hearts.

### **C. THE LOVE OF GOD FOR US**

*Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

A little over a month before he died, the famous atheist Jean-Paul Sartre declared that he so strongly resisted feelings of despair that he would say to himself, "I know I shall die in hope." Then in profound sadness, he would add, "But hope needs a foundation."

When we have hope in God, nothing can shake us, nothing can terrify us. Because He guards our hearts, He let us know that He will never leave us, nor forsake us, He reminds us His love for us. He becomes our song in the dark night. He puts melodies of hope and joy in our hearts to sing praises to Him. This is something unbelievers can not fathom.

In chapter 16 of the Book of Acts, apostle Paul the jail bird ended up in the jail in Philippi with his sidekick Silas. Around midnight, because of the hope and joy that welled up in their hearts for the Lord, these two guys whose legs and hands were fastened in the stocks, started to sing praise songs. The Father in heaven heard their worship and tapped His foot little too hard in hoe down and ended up having an earthquake on earth.

How could they sing hymns and praise songs while they were bound in the stocks. Were they a couple of fruitcakes from California? No, they got to learn about joy and hope in the Lord.

It doesn't matter how spiritually mature you think you are. While you are going through trials and tribulations, if your response is like a roller coaster from one mountain top to another valley, you are not mature as you want others to believe or you think.

True spiritual maturity displays its best when trials and tribulations are at their worst. You can find your rest in the shelter of Almighty in the presence of your enemies.

Does this mean that those whose emotion go up and down have no chance of becoming spiritually mature people? Absolutely not. It all depends on your decision to look at the situation. You can look at it as disadvantages and difficulties or you can see it as heavenly advantage like apostle Paul did often.

*2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Meeting every situation with hope and joy in our hearts isn't a denial of trouble. It helps us see those situations from God's perspective – as opportunities to discover His power and love. Every time we express gratitude to God in a difficult situation, we're declaring, "God is alive!"

Man's disappointments are often God's appointments, and the things we believe are tragedies may be the very opportunities through which God chooses to exhibit His love and grace. When people are broken before the Lord, they become better and more effective Christians than if they had carried out all their own plans and purposes. For a Christian, wholeness always comes after brokenness.

#### **D. APPLICATIONS**

1) If you've gone through an unspeakable difficulty, the Lord your God especially designed it for you. Now you are equipped to minister to others as God ministered to you.

2) If you are going through that horrible valley of the shadow of death now, please remember that He is with you no matter what and He is shaping you and molding you to give you hope and joy in your heart.

3) If you are going to go through another difficulty in the future, please remember that God will not give you more than you can bear.