

A Hope that Never Disappoints

Romans Series

By Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

Bible Text: Romans 5:1-5

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OPENING PRAYER:

Gracious God and Father, thank you for the oceans of love that you have poured out upon us in Jesus Christ. That you have removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west, as though you had drowned them in the depths of the sea. And that you have brought us now in Jesus Christ to have access into the grace in which we stand to rejoice in our hope of the glory of God. We thank you for the privilege of glorifying you in praise. And making you seem marvelous to one another as we encourage and teach one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. And we thank you that you make yourself glorious in our eyes through your Word. And we pray with our Lord Jesus Christ tonight that as we come and feast on the Scriptures that you would glorify your name among us, even as in past years you have glorified it. Will you not glorify it among us and through us again? Pardon our sins and our impoverished hearing of your Word. Touch our hearts and draw us, we pray, into your presence that we may hear your accent. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated.

SCRIPTURE READING:

The only thing that's wrong that marvelous Welsh hymn of William Reese is it has only got two verses. And once you are up to cruising altitude with that great hymn, suddenly you have to cease. So we should have a church competition to write some more verses for that hymn. They would need to be done in the Welsh style. So those of you who have Welsh sounding names, you need to put hymnic pen to paper.

Now we are turning again this evening for our Scripture reading to the fifth chapter of Romans. Romans Chapter 5 verses one through five, page 942 in the pew Bible — the English Standard Version you will find in the pew. And, once again, I think this may be the fifth Sunday that we have done this, we are going to read verses one through five. I

was thinking as I came to church this evening about this passage that every right minded man who ever does any travelling learns very quickly the first rule of preparing to travel. Pack your own bag. Don't let your wife pack your bag. The reason for this is not she will pack the wrong things. Your wife and mine would never dream of doing that, but that if your wife packs your bag when it is time to come home, you will never be able to get everything back into the bag. And Romans chapter five can seem very much like that. There is just so much almost oozes out of these words for us to consider. And we are coming to an end of our consideration of them in this evening.

So let us hear God's Word.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Well, I never thought that David Lauten, of all men, would disappoint me. I thought if anyone can produce a genie out of a lamp for the children, then it would surely be David Lauten. But even a good man like David Lauten can let you down and disappoint you. And you and I, most of us, have had far greater disappointments in life than the expectation that one of our ministers might produce a genie and then the reassurance to the children that there was no genie to be seen in his little lamp. You would be a strange person if you had never known disappointment.

And one of the things Paul has been interestingly speaking about here is that there are many things in life and in the Christian's life that do disappoint and yet God employs them in his own perfect wisdom and sovereignty to make something of us. And I suppose many of us looking back on our Christian lives at the disappointments that we have had and the way God has taught us to respond to disappointments and what he has done through those disappointments in weaning us away from our own aspirations for our lives to his aspiration for our life and weaning us away from the way in which our hopes are often placed in fallible objects, to place our hope in our infallible God.

But disappointment, that sense—to use the language of the English Standard Version here—that sense of shame that comes because our hopes have been dashed and therefore it seems that either our hope has been misplaced or the object of our hope has proven to be

frail and unworthy of our trust. That is an almost every day experience among God's people.

And, indeed, it is an experience that is sometimes described and mediated on, isn't it, in the book of Psalms. Some of the most radical expressions of disappointment in the life of a believer are found in the book of Psalms. I think particularly of that agonizing cry of the psalmist in Psalm 102 when he pours out his soul to God and cries out to God in the 10th verse. You lifted me up and you enlarged my hopes, but now it seems as though you have discarded me like a worn out garment or like a broken child's toy. And you have no purpose for me any longer. And in the face of difficult and testing providences, God's children have not infrequently felt that way as God has given us so many, as the Scriptures say, so many "great and precious promises". And yet the providences of God seem to disappoint our hopes until God brings us through. And we learn the lesson here of Romans chapter five and verse five that the hope that the gospel gives to us never disappoints us, never exposes us to shame. Because God's love has been "poured into our hearths through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Now, of course, this hope that he is speaking of, the hope of glory, the hope of eternal life is the hope to which he has been moving almost in a pincer movement in the first four verses. We saw in verses one and two how he had spoken about being justified by faith and having peace with God and having access into this grace in which we stand that leads us to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. When we are gripped by the truth of the gospel, justification by grace through faith, we begin to understand that our salvation is absolutely secure. We are as justified today as we will be justified in the last day in Jesus Christ. So that even already we can inwardly rejoice. We can even inwardly dance. As someone once said, "Peace is joy resting and joy is peace dancing."

And then amazingly as Paul has taught us to rejoice as the truth of the gospel grips us, he's also brought us to the same place through the experiences of our Christian lives. We rejoice not only in the hope of the glory of God, but we rejoice, verse three, in our sufferings because we know suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces in us this same hope of sharing the glory of God. So that it's not just the truth of the gospel that our minds grasp that causes to rejoice inwardly, but what God is doing in our lives, not these through sufferings and trials produces within us a responsive sense of sure hope and a wonderful sense of glorying or rejoicing in our sufferings. Because we know that God's pattern in his Son and in all those who belong to his Son is that suffering is, as it were, the basic commodity out of which he produces the end product of glory. So in this pincer movement he has brought us, as it were, to the edge of the sea and he saying to us, now, look out from the edge of the sea to the horizon of the ocean. God has given you the hope that one day over the horizon the glory of God will appear and you will indubitably share in that glory.

But... but... most of us have had a sufficient number of our hopes dashed if not demolished to ask the question: Will this hope also let me down? Will this hope also disappoint me? Did you ask in the early days of your Christian life, as I remember asking in the very early days of my Christian life? — I couldn't wait to be a Christian a week. I just longed to be able to be a little older than two days. And one of the questions in my mind was: Will this hope that God has given to me in the gospel, this hope of eternal life and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, will this hope also disappoint me? Will it put me to shame among those whom I have already confessed: I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. Paul is coming back to this question and he is saying to us, Now, once you have grasped the gospel, he says, You will come to understand that this hope will never ever disappoint us, because...

You notice that word in verse five? Because. And, you see, he is back to his old pastoral tactics. He is saying to us, if you ask him the question, will this hope disappoint me? Will I be put to shame? Then don't simply allow that fear and anxiety to pour around in your mind. If you do... if you do not bring to that sickness of mind the medicine of the gospel, then you may be plunged into a sense of great need and despair. And so he is saying what he is so often saying in so many different way in his letters. Oh, Christian believers in Rome, think the gospel through. Think the gospel through. Think, think, think, he says. This hope will not disappoint us, because of something. Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has already been given to us.

Now I want us to look here at three things that Paul is saying. First of all, the basic affirmation that he makes. What is he saying in this verse? Second, at the explanation he gives to us why the hope of glory will never disappoint us. And then I want us, as we close this evening, to think about some very important application of this to the manner and style in which we seek to live the Christian life.

Oh, what is his affirmation? It is really very simple. And I think I can unfold it in three simple stages. Number one, he says, remember that God has given you his Holy Spirit. And it is obvious here, isn't it, that Paul is not speaking about one class of Christian believers. He assumes this is true of all Christian believers. Later on in chapter eight, verses eight and nine, we will find him saying, If you don't have the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in you, the problem is actually that you are not a Christian.

And the logic, of course, is if you are a Christian believer, then the Holy Spirit has been given to you. Frequently in his letters he makes this point in one way or another. All Christian believers have been given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in all Christian believers. As Jesus says in John chapter 14 when he goes to the Father on his ascension and victory he will ask the Father and the Father will give to his people another Counselor — the Holy Spirit. And through the Holy Spirit, by the Holy Spirit's presence

in our lives the Father and the Son together will come, says Jesus, and make our dwelling place with you. So this is a fundamental privilege Paul is saying of every Christian. The Holy Spirit, at the end of the verse, has been given to us.

Second thing he is saying, that with the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's love has been poured into our hearts. Isn't that an amazing thing? What exactly does he mean by this? Well, it seems pretty obvious from what he goes on to say in verses six to eight that he is not so much speaking about our love for God, but God's love for us as it is translated here in our version. God's love. It may be the love of God if you are using an older version. But Paul doesn't so much think here of the love that we have for him. What is being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us is God's love for us in which the apostle rejoices. He is saying, Yes, God loves us. He is saying, God has so loved the world he's given his only Son for us. So, in a sense, God has already poured out his love into the world in the cross of Calvary. But he is saying now that God gives his Holy Spirit, God pours his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.

Does that mean — it means that when we become a Christian we not only know because of the cross that he loves us, we know because when the Holy Spirit comes he comes as the Spirit who brings right into our hearts this love of God that produces, perhaps for the very first time in our lives, this wonderful sense that the words that we used to sing when we were children are really true. God loves me. God loves me.

And, you see, when that happens something marvelous also happens because it's the love of God in our hearts that then, says Paul, is not only present because of the Holy Spirit. Look at the verb he uses. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Amazing thing, isn't it? It is not just that God has said, Well, I'll just give them a little bit of my love. But God through the Spirit pours his love into our hearts. And we want to say, At last, you think, I think I begin to understand what David was talking about in the 23rd Psalm, "my cup runs over."

I often think, of these words. I wonder if you do, at the Lord's table. We had the Lord's supper with some of the youngsters at 1:30 this afternoon and I so often find myself at the end of a celebration of the Lord's supper with such a sense of his love that I do feel I could love my enemies. I do sense that as God pours his love into my heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to me and my sense of that love is quickened by what I have heard and what I have seen, what I have touched and handled and tasted and what communally we have experienced. Well, we are Presbyterians and we could never do it. But don't you want to go around the congregation at the end of the Lord's supper and hug a few people that you might have fallen out with and say to them, This is too glorious for us to spoil and mar this?

You know, when people say to me as sometimes people do, you know, “I don’t really need the Lord’s supper.” I think I want to say to them, When did you have a desire to hug every Christian believer you know. You have never really experienced the Lord’s supper. You see? And this is what he is saying. The Holy Spirit is given to every believer when the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. He brings with him right into our lives a consciousness of the love of God for us and that love of God is poured out into our hearts and our cup runs over through the gift of the Holy Spirit. That’s the affirmation that he is making.

Now, secondly, because you notice that that affirmation is set in the context of argumentation. He’s making that statement in order to prove a point so I want us to move from the affirmation to the explanation. Why is it that the pouring of God’s love out in our hearts gives us this great confidence that our hope will never let us down? Because that’s his logic. Hope does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Why do we know that this hope of glory will never disappoint us because of this sense of God’s love being poured into us? Well, it’s fairly obvious, isn’t it? It is because this is the love of God by which we have been justified — what he was speaking about in verse one. It is because of the love of God and the gift of his Son that the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been given to us. And it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that gives us confidence that, “bold shall we stand in that great day clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.”

And, yes, it is also true that it is this love that this sustained Paul and sustains us through times of suffering. This is why the Christian is able to rejoice in his or her suffering because he or she knows that the loving heavenly Father is doing us good through it. He is shaping us and molding us. And he has this great end in view to transform us into the likeness of Christ. He loves us too much to leave us the way he found us. And so we know that this hope will never disappoint us because the love that lies behind our justification is the love that sustains us in our experience of suffering.

But there is something else, isn’t there? We are confident of future glory because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit and that love of God that this poured into our hearts is actually a present experience of that final reality.

Some of you may have read the great work of Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*. And he has a chapter there with a really marvelous title. It is this. *Heaven: a world of love. Heaven: A world of love*. That’s why on occasion, incidentally, sometimes in worship when we are taken up by the love of God and that love is spread abroad in our fellowship that we are able to go out and say, “That was a heavenly service, wasn’t it?”

Because we have already tasted here and now what we will experience fully and permanently there and then. And it's almost as though God in sending his Holy Spirit has opened a chasm in heaven and said to the Holy Spirit, now, as you go, take down with you a taste of heaven right into their hearts. So the confidence the believer has in the hope of glory lies both in the promise of God's Word, the truth of the gospel, but it also lies in the experience of the believer that the believer has actually already had a foretaste of heaven, even while living on the earth.

And this is why the New Testament uses language about the Holy Spirit that suggests to us the gift of the Holy Spirit is, as it were, God's down payment on future glory. We are given the Spirit, says the apostle Paul, as the earnest, the down payment, the pledge, the first fruits of the final harvest — when free from sin we will be able to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and also it will become easy to love our neighbor as ourselves. Easy. Natural. It is unimaginable. Isn't it? Don't you like easy? I love easy. I could live easy. But to be able to say that loving one another with fervency from the heart is doing what comes naturally, is not something we can yet say. But one day we will.

And we have this confidence, says the apostle, that we really will, because we have already become to taste it. And we have, haven't we? In the fellowship in the church family. You think of the number of people... well, don't think of the number of people. It wouldn't be sanctifying for you. But theoretically think of the number of people that you have known in any church to which you have belonged that have made you think if it weren't for the gospel, you and I would not be in the same town, never mind in the same church family. And people who are so different from you in every kind of respect, that if you did one of these psychological tests they would say, keep these people as far apart as you possibly can. There'll be an explosion. But they are as the lot of God is poured into their hearts a little bit of heaven comes down. "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul." Well, not quite yet. Not quite yet. But it is poured out into your heart by the Holy Spirit.

Now when we get into chapter eight and we are a few months away, aren't we, from chapter eight, we'll discover the apostle Paul telling us this. And it is important for us to know it here and now, because this is not heaven. No matter how good this may get, this is not heaven yet. Paul has this to say, doesn't he, in Romans chapter eight.

We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly. Now why do we do that? Do you see the paradox of the Christian life? It is very important that we grasp it. Sometimes people say to us, now if only you had more of the Holy Spirit you would find yourself so transported that many of your difficulties in life would disappear and you would never know a touch of frustration. And Paul is saying, actually, the truth is nearer the opposite

of that. It's precisely because we taste this even in this world that we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the final harvest of it.

If you've tasted this, you can never be as satisfied with this world as people who've never tasted it can be. And you can never be as indifferent to your sin as people who've never tasted this tend to be.

So this is not a recipe for ease in the Christian life. But it is something that teaches us that even in the midst of the agony, the Christian Church and the individual believer may also taste the heavenly ecstasy of the love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So there's an affirmation. There's an explanation. And finally I want to make a number of observations by way of application. And you will be glad to know the number is two. You might have been gladder to know the number was one, but two may be easier than three.

The first is this. You sense, don't you, what a difference this makes to your present fellowship with God. This makes all the difference to your present fellowship with God. That the heavenly Father has poured his Spirit into your heart and in pouring his Spirit into your heart has brought his love for you right down into your heart so that in your very being you experience and know the love of God for you.

What difference does it make? Do you remember the parable of Jesus in Luke chapter 19 where he has one of the characters hiding — hiding his master's possessions in his little towel, dug a little hole in the field and hid it away. And then when the master came back he said, "Master, I have got it back for you." And then he says this. Now the master is the Lord, of course, isn't he? He says this. "I knew you were a hard man and so I buried it in the field."

You can understand that, can't you? Some of us probably can understand that very easily. And to our shame we have sometimes thought of him as a hard man — reaping where he did not sow. You know that's one of the saddest things about our lives. How often it is true in the work of Christian ministry that somebody comes to you and wonders if God has deserted them. Is he that hard?

On the contrary, says the apostle, "He has poured his love into your heart." Now he says, put everything else into its proper perspective in the context of this amazing out pouring on Calvary. And then, by the Holy Spirit of the love of God. He's given you everything he has. He's given you his Son on Calvary and he's given you his Spirit with his love.

And yet, you know, we can be ... we can easily be taken up with that notion that he doesn't really love us. I often find myself saying not least interestingly in minister's conferences, you need to understand that the gospel is not God loves you because Christ died for you. That's not the gospel. That is actually almost a contradiction of the gospel. The gospel is: God loves you, therefore Christ died for you. Jesus Christ did not on the cross twist the hand of an unloving Father to love the unlovely. God sent his Son into the world that through him we might have everlasting life. He so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

So do you see how the gospel just underscores for us so beautifully that the revelation of the love of Christ for us that we have on the cross is confirmed by the love that the Holy Spirit pours out in our hearts? And both of those loves, the outpoured love through the Spirit and the outpoured love through the Son are actually the love of the heavenly Father us?

And do you know if we grasp that, if we grasp what the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are utterly at one in loving us, it can make a huge difference to our fellowship with God and how we commune with him. Listen to the words of a far greater than I, the great John Owen who knew a thing or two about this. Have patience as I read these words. And soak yourself in their truth. Listen to this.

“Unacquaintedness, that is just a big word for not knowing. Unacquaintedness with our mercies and our privileges is our sin as well as our trouble. We hearken not—that means listen—we don't listen to the voice of the Spirit who has given to us that we may know the things that are freely bestowed on us of God. This,” he says, “makes us go heavily when we might rejoice. And to be weak where we might be strong in the Lord.” And then he says this, out of great personal experience, and the observation of many Christians, “How few of the saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the Father in love. With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon him? What fears, what questionings are there of his good will and kindness? At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus. It is true that alone is the way of communication. But the free fountain and spring of all is in the bosom of the Father.”

The Father himself loves you and that can make all the difference in the world, can't it, to the basic sense of fellowship that we have with him. And, therefore, it brings about almost immediately and necessarily a second line of interpretation. It not only makes a difference to our present sense of fellowship with God, but it certainly makes a difference—follow me—to the present tone of our Christian lives.

What do I mean by tone? Well, there are tones in color, aren't there? And there are tones in music. You know what tone is. You might say to your child one day, "I don't like that tone of yours." It's not the words they are saying. It is that sense of almost indefinable disposition that something that's out of kilter, that's out of sync, that needs to be recalibrated. And, you know, when you grasp this truth that the love of God is poured out into your heart by the Holy Spirit who's being given to you, it can make all the difference in the world to the tone of your life. You will not be a metallic Christian any longer. It really does produce something in you.

Now just a word about this, my friends, because it seems to me we are much in need of a word about this. What is the gospel saying to us? The gospel is saying to us that we are unlovely and unlovable. But in his amazing mercy, God has chosen to love us in Jesus Christ and to pour his love into our hearts.

I don't know whether it's on television all the time, but I happened to be watching a program on a news type program one morning, I think, last week and I caught about 30 seconds of a discussion. Forgive the illustration, but this was the illustration that was given that somewhere between 65 and 70 percent of American women dislike their bodies. And the next thing that was said, you will know what it was, this self help counselor said, "What we need to do is to learn to love ourselves."

Now, that is not the gospel way. You don't say to sinners, not least sinners who really have begun to despise themselves, you don't say to them, your need is to begin to love yourself. What you say to them in the gospel is this, dear one, if you only really knew how unlovely you seem before a holy God. Things are really far worse than you fear. But there is good news for you. And it's not — learn to love yourself. It's learn this. That God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever, whoever is ugly, whoever is broken, whoever is demeaned and despised, who comes to trust in him might have eternal life.

You see, the gospel says to us, dear one, you have no resources in yourself. But there are resources in Jesus Christ that can gloriously transform your life even to the point where eventually—and this really would be the fruit of the gospel—you actually begin to forget yourself out of love for Jesus Christ and love for others. And then you begin to become your true self in Jesus Christ and realize that by his grace, his love transforms you in a way your love could never ever in a million years transform you. And to catch a taste of the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. And as Paul goes on to say, you see, it was when we were weak, it was when we were ungodly, it was when we were ugly and when we were sinners that Christ died for us. Oh, "what wondrous love is this, oh my soul, oh my soul."

It must have been 20 years ago I was speaking at the old Pensacola Theological Institute of Happy Memory. Stopped meeting about 20 years ago and one of the other speakers was Frank Barker, the man who planted that gigantic PCA church, Briarwood in Birmingham. And we went out for coffee afterwards. I've never forgotten it because of two things. They had just built this enormous building and he had had a major hand, of course, in everything in it. And a kind of know all Christian came along and started speaking to us. He had been at the conference. He knew we were ministers. He went on and on and on about ministers knowing absolutely nothing about how to raise money. And there was this man who had probably in the 1980s raised about 25 million dollars to build this huge church campus. And he exuded grace by saying absolutely not a word about what he had done,. Because he didn't need to speak about what he had accomplished. His security was and is in Christ.

But the other thing was — a lady came over to speak to us, told us the miserable story of her life and how she had been abused, and abused by her husband. And then she had come to Christ and she said in the sweetest way to the two of these ministers—I don't know whether she thought we would be surprised at the power of the gospel. She said, "For the very first time in my life when I came to Christ I knew I was loved." I knew I was loved.

Well, that is why this hope never puts us to shame and never ever disappoints us. You do have this hope tonight, don't you? And at least a taste of the love of God poured out into your heart. Now if that is true, you'll never be able to get this back into the suitcase from which it has just come. So go and luxuriate in the love of Jesus Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for the riches of your Word and the wonder of your presence. For the way in which you, our holy Father, have loved us, the way in which you, beloved Savior Jesus, have died for us, the way in which you, blessed Spirit, have come with the love of the Father and the Son and poured that love into our hearts. Help us we pray to bask in that love, to be sure of that hope and now ourselves to spread aboard in our witness and by our lives that love that has been poured into our hearts. And this we pray for Jesus our Savior's sake. Amen.