

Rich in hope - Sunday 6th December, 2015

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.(Romans 15:13)

Beloved in The Lord,

So many people believe that if only they could win lotto, they would be happy and their life would be great. The truth of the matter is that there is absolutely no guarantee that that would be the case. There are people who have won lotto who have found the exact opposite to be true. It has turned out to be a curse and not a blessing.

There are however riches that always bring joy and peace and they are the riches we find in God. A person can be poor by worldly standards and yet abound in riches in God. A person may have little or no possessions in this world and yet be extremely wealthy in God by virtue of faith in Him.

We live in a time when many are spiritually bankrupt. They have no hope, because they have no faith in the one true God, who reveals Himself through Jesus Christ. So many are striving for riches, they are expending all their time and energy pursuing worldly wealth and are spiritually dead and bankrupt. This is why the world is in such a terrible mess.

Praise God that there is a solution. There is hope. Today the second Advent candle is burning. Advent is a time of hope, because Advent turns our attention upon Jesus Christ.

Jesus came into this hopeless world bringing hope. He came to bring light and to save us from hopeless despair and eternal darkness. He is the one whom the prophets hoped and longed for. He is life and light. He is the light that shines in the darkness. Paul writes: ***“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:11-14)***

You see we have hope. God’s grace has shone forth, it has appeared bringing salvation to all people. The grace of God that has appeared is His Son Jesus Christ, whose birthday we will celebrate shortly. We have hope in the midst of despair, because we have Jesus Christ.

It is of vital importance that we remain firmly focused on Him, because if we divert our attention from Him even for a moment, we lose perspective and we begin to drown in despair.

Without Jesus Christ there is and can be no true hope. Many people dream and have unfounded hopes and desires, and very often they are disappointed. Hope in Jesus never disappoints for hope in Him is not unfounded. Our hope is underwritten by God’s awesome

promises that in turn are underwritten by God Himself. We have an Iron clad guarantee, for God is always faithful to His Word. Right at the outset when Adam and Eve fell, God told them that one day a Saviour will come. Out of His grace and mercy, God gave fallen man hope. We read:

***“The Lord God said to the serpent,
“Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you will go,
And dust you will eat
All the days of your life;
¹⁵ And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15)***

This is the first promise of the Messiah. He will crush the head of the serpent (Satan). This promise was fulfilled on Easter morning when Jesus rose from the dead having been bitten in the heel by Satan, but Satan’s head was crushed when the stone rolled away and Jesus walked out of the tomb.

Returning to our foundation text we find that Paul emphasises that the author of our hope is God. He writes:

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

Paul calls God – The God of hope. What a beautiful description of God. God is the God of hope. Are you lacking hope, - go to the God of Hope. He loves you and He will freely fill your heart with hope if you come to Him. He is rich in hope and wants you to be also. He doesn’t desire for you to live in ignorance or fear or despair. He wants to fill you with hope. He does not want you to live weighed down with despair. No. He wants to fill you with hope and joy and peace in faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Last Sunday we saw that our mission is to be like the Advent Candle that shines out into an ever darkening world. We saw that our life should be a living witness for God.

Hope is a very powerful testimony, it is a very bright light that shines for Jesus. When people see that we do not crumble in despair, that we do not cower in fear, that we are not dreading tomorrow, that we have a sound mind and are stable, they will want to know the secret. It gives us a great opportunity to witness and to tell them about the love of Jesus. We can tell them I am like this because I am a Christian. I have placed my trust in Jesus who is the one and only true God.

Peter writes: ***“but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;” (1.Pet.3:15)***

You see, our lives should be so overflowing with hope, with joy, with peace, that people will want to know how that can be. Then we must be ready to tell them. Oh, how we as Christians need to work on this. I really believe that in this respect we are nowhere near as bright as we could and should be.

That is because too much worldliness has infiltrated our lives. We are more concerned and focused on the world than on Jesus Christ. We fill our hearts and mind with all forms of negative rubbish and feed so little on God’s Word.

Introducing our foundation text Paul writes: ***“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ² Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” ⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 15:1-6)***

Paul is reminding us that we are not here to live for ourselves. We are here to fulfil God’s plan and purpose. God’s purpose and plan is that we help others and bring people to Him.

In order to be strong we need to delve deeply into God’s Word. In order to edify our neighbour, in order to be able to help the weak, we must be strong in the midst of our own problems. We must be rich in hope. That is a powerful testimony, that truly touches people.

I will never forget that day in December 1979 when my mother died suddenly. I was only 16. I walked out of the hospital room into a nearby waiting room and I cried out to God. I said: “Lord, I don’t know what You are doing, but I know that You know what is best. I trust You.” Instantly my heart was filled with an indescribable peace and joy.

Yes, it was hard to say goodbye to Mum, but I had hope because I knew that Mum loved Jesus and that she had gone to be with Him. At her funeral, so many people asked me why I was so calm and why I hadn’t gone to pieces like the rest of my family. I had so many beautiful opportunities to testify to the truth, that God is in control and that in Him is life and hope.

You see, my beloved friends, we must live out our faith. It is not enough just to confess with our mouths that we believe. Our faith must manifest itself in our life and works.

Remember God has not saved us so that we would sit down and snooze in the warmth of His grace. No. He has made us His ambassadors. We are His representatives in this world.

Our light must shine before men, not only in the good times, but even more so in the bad times, in those times when the bottom drops out of our world.

This can only happen if we stay close to Christ. We need to be in His Word every day.

May we allow the God of hope to fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.