

**Blessed– Sunday August 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.**

***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,

Many people have a misguided view of Christianity and the Christian life, because the witness of Christians has not always been very good. So many people who call themselves “Christian” do not reflect God in any meaningful way in their lives.

Some words that describe God are: Love, joy, peace, hope and power. Jesus taught that the main distinguishing feature that would prove that we are His disciples is the love that we show for one another. We read in John 13:35: ***“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** Love of God and love of fellow man are the basic commandments of our Christian faith. They are at the very core of our faith.

Another distinguishing characteristic, or at least it should be, is hope. Paul writes in today’s text: ***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.***

A Christian should abound in hope. The sad truth is that many do not, and so the witness of the Church is weak. So many Christians are weak in their faith, lacking in hope and love and peace and joy and power. This is because they are not firmly rooted in The Bible – The true and living Word of Almighty God.

In order to be strong in our faith and to have a good witness, in order that our light shines brightly and that our salt is salty, we need to be in God’s Word. We need to have the Living Water of His Word flowing in and through us by the power of The Holy Spirit. We need to be close to the source.

The source is God and His Holy Word. We need to be in Jesus and to have the Holy Spirit flowing through us. When we are walking in the Spirit, in Christ, then we reflect His love.

John teaches us: ***“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1.John 2:15-17).***

If our love and focus is on this world, on ourselves, on our possessions, on our net worth, our pleasure, then our lives will be carnal, fleshly, of this world. As Christians we are called out of this type of life. The word for Church in Greek is “Ecclesia” which means the called out ones. We are called not to be carnal, but spiritual. We are not to live by the standards of this world, but by God’s standards. We are called to follow Jesus.

He simply invites us “Follow Me”.

To follow Jesus is to move your focus off this world and onto Him. When we do everything changes. We find that we are free. In Christ our sins are washed away in His blood and we are a new person. Paul writes: ***“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).***

In his letter to the Ephesians he writes: ***“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; <sup>2</sup> and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2).***

To imitate God, is to obey His Word. When we do, we are rich. We are rich in hope, in faith, in peace, in joy. In reality all of these things tie together. They can all be summed up in the word – BLESSED.

We read in Psalm 1:

***How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!***

***<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.***

***<sup>3</sup> He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,  
Which yields its fruit in its season  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.***

***<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,  
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.***

***<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.***

***<sup>6</sup> For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish.***

A blessed person is like a tree that is planted near living waters. Through this person flows the Holy Spirit of God, the true Living Water. That persons heart is full of joy, full of hope, full of love.

To be this tree, we must be firmly rooted in God’s Word. A tree that has only very shallow roots is easily toppled. So that we are not easily toppled by the storms of life, we must have deep roots in God’s Word.

The Apostle Paul experienced many storms in his life, he was often in peril, often in serious situations that threatened him, but he stood the test and finished the course of His life, keeping strong in Jesus. He neither lost his faith nor hope. This is because he was deeply and firmly rooted in God’s Word, in Jesus and relied upon the Holy Spirit in all things. He was able to write:

***“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).*** A better translation would read “I can do all things through Him who empowers me from within.” The Him is Jesus. The key to a strong faith and a blessed life is Jesus. We need to surrender all to Him in faith. To

trust in Him willingly and knowingly. To say: I can't do it, but you can through me. Not me but You Lord. This is the key to being blessed.

I have said this before, and will say it again: We need to decrease that He may increase. We pray "Your will be done, Your Kingdom come." We need to constantly say "Not my will, Lord, but Yours."

We need to understand that we are His creation. He has a will and purpose for our lives and this will only be properly and fully realised when we surrender all to Him. When we do, then we are blessed. We have an abundance of hope in our heart. We have an abundance of joy and peace. We find that love flows in and through us. The fruit of the Spirit is present: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control;" (Galatians 5:22-23).***

The more prominent this fruit, the greater our witness. What person will not be drawn to Christ if they see this fruit in our life?

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; <sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame " (1.Peter 3:15-16).***

This causes us to ask: "Does my life so reflect Jesus, that people ask me why I display such hope; such peace; such joy; such love?" Do people see and feel something different around us?

For it to be so, we must do what Peter says-we must sanctify Christ. That means that we put Him first in everything. We seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. we love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We read His Word daily. We obey Him always. We pray without ceasing. We live in close communion with Him.

This is much more than going to Church once a week, and saying a few quick prayers at bed time.

Paul writes to the Colossians: ***"therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, <sup>7</sup> having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;" (Colossians 2:6-10)***

The fullness of God dwells in Christ. If you dwell in Him, then you are blessed and this fullness is also yours. Your witness will be clean and true and will say "In Jesus my life is blessed."

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.