

Hope for 2013

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[0 : 00] Even a 24-hour day, never mind a year, can make a huge difference to the course of our lives. Especially if your name is Jack Bauer and you've got 24 hours to save the world.

But for Jack Bauer, it's the most 24-hour traumatic day of his life. For everyone watching, it's just wasted 24 hours. But either way, 24 hours makes a difference. And a year in our lives makes a huge difference.

And so at the end of it, as it comes, you know, closer to the end of the year, and as it comes to 11 p.m. on the 31st of December, we get very conscious of time passing by.

The world around us is changing. People around us have changed. And as we reflect, we feel the need to change ourselves as well. The change is troubling.

And sometimes we want to change just to keep up with the pace of everything else. Everything from changing our clothes to changing our minds. Most of the time, in truth, the changes that we make, and the New Year's resolutions, rather being a desire for something really new, are an attempt to control or to limit the change that's already happening too fast in our lives.

[1 : 14] We make resolutions, for example, to change diet and exercise, because we look in the mirror or we go for a walk and we don't like how our body is changing. Many other changes we make to save more, to spend more time with children.

Whatever the change might be, chances are that we're doing it because we're afraid of what else might change if we don't. We don't like change. That's why whenever people look at a child, if they haven't seen them for a while, they say, Wow, you've really grown.

Because I think deep down in our hearts, we kind of expect everything to just stay the same. We almost get shocked when a child grows, whereas it would be terrible if a child remained two feet tall all their life, wouldn't it? But we don't really like it when things change.

But it's nearly 2013, and everything, everything except God, has changed and is changing. And being a believer is being certain of what we're changing into.

So that as we see all the change in the world around us, we don't get overcome with fear and troubled in our minds, but instead we well up with hope.

[2 : 27] Why? Well, turn with me please to Romans 8. We'll read it through together. Excuse me when I cough. So Romans chapter 8.

I'll just read through the whole chapter, and we're going to look through it briefly. We're not going to focus on anything in too much detail. But the flow of the chapter kind of lends itself to looking at it all at once.

So we'll read the whole chapter. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh? God did, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemns sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

[3 : 41] The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit, thank you again, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God or the children of God, the Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship, and by him we cry, Abba, Father.

[4 : 56] The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may share in his glory.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to this present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope, we are saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

[6 : 23] And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

And those He predestined, He also called. Those He called, He also justified. Those He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say in response to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who is raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, for your sake, we face death all day long.

[7 : 30] We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

So we'll just pray briefly before we look at the passage. Father, we thank You for Your Word. And we thank You, Lord, that we have it in our own language, that we can freely read it and think about it and hear it talked about.

And Father, we pray that as we look at it now that You would help us to understand it and apply it to our hearts and lives and be changed as a result to be more like Jesus. And in His name we pray.

Amen. Well, Romans 5 till the end of chapter 8, I suppose the biggest theme is probably the theme of hope.

Hope comes through faith. And chapter 8, particularly towards the end, is all about the future hope. But before we get to that, Paul talks about two different types of people.

[8 : 55] And the reason why he does is because only one group has a future. Only one has a hope. So verses 1 to 17, briefly then, the people of the Spirit and the people of the flesh.

Now, he starts with those who are in Christ, identified with Christ. They have the Holy Spirit that was living in Christ, now living in them. Now, previously in chapter 7, he had been talking about the law, the moral law, the Old Testament law, the simple knowledge of right and wrong, and how really, even though it's good in itself, it condemns us as human beings because we fail to keep it. So here in verse 3, if you look at verse 3, when he writes about the law being powerless because it was weakened by the flesh, he is saying that, right and good, though the law may be, it won't save us from our sinful, selfish self because the more law we know, the more we just end up breaking. So really, even though the law, like the law in society, may have a restraining effect on us, because of the way we are as human beings, because of our sinful selves, always inclined to look out for number one, then it might help us clean up a little, but it will never really change who we are deep down.

And that's because we've got a serious problem. Now Paul describes it here as the flesh. Now he's not literally, of course, talking about our skin or our shells or our physical bodies, but really more the fallen part of our humanity, our worldly desires and our materialism and our worship of self.

[10 : 37] And instead of, I suppose, using the word material, like the material uses versus the spiritual, he uses flesh. Because the image is more like something to do with our own humanness.

Even, if you will, if you kind of stretch it about our human meat. Meat, it's not, a flesh is not an appealing term. If you think of flesh, flesh of an animal or a flesh of a human, it might be something that looks nice and appealing one day, but a few days down the line it's all rotten.

It's not really that glamorous an image. Now if we think about the context of Romans, it'll maybe make it a little bit clearer. In AD 49, Claudius, he expelled all the Jews from Rome.

And the reason was because there was continual rioting between the Jewish Orthodox, the Jewish believers, or the Jewish Jews, and the Jewish Christians. So the Jews, whether they were Christians or whether they were traditional Jews, they were all expelled from Rome.

And Aquila and Priscilla, I suppose, in Acts 18.2 are examples of this. It talks about it in Acts 18.2. But five years later, whenever Nero came to power in AD 54, the expulsion was revoked and all the Jews, including the Jewish believers, were allowed back to Rome.

[11 : 56] So now, as Paul writes in AD 57, he's writing to a church that was predominantly Gentile believers for five years and then the Jews come back, Jewish believers, and they're struggling to understand the whole thing about the Jewish heritage and the gospel.

And that's what Paul writes to. Now, for the Jew, the word flesh goes right back to creation. When Adam looked at Eve and he says, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, it's really the meat of human existence.

God says later, at the time of Noah, that all flesh had become corrupted and we have other references to flesh and the flesh of man. So, for the Jewish, for the Jews, the Jewish understanding is that for man to be flesh means that man is mortal.

He is dying. And so, in verse 3, when Paul writes that Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh, he isn't saying that Jesus came in the likeness of sinful nature. It doesn't make any sense to say that Jesus looked like he had a sinful nature.

But what is clear is that Jesus was born in human flesh. He was born just like us with a decaying and cursed body even though he had no sin.

[13 : 10] he was born in the flesh just like us sinners. And the purpose of it, as he says, was so that he could offer his flesh as a sacrifice to us, for us, to redeem our bodies through the Spirit.

And so, the whole consequence of Paul's argument is that he's saying for those in Christ, there is no condemnation. Instead, we have the same Holy Spirit that was in Christ living in us.

so that unlike before when we didn't know Christ, when it was impossible for us to keep the law, we can now keep the law by following Christ because we follow the one who kept the law, who came in the flesh.

So then in verses 5-8, we move on, we have this great distinction between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit. Those who live out their lives always keeping in mind their own flesh, their own skin, their own earthly, mortal existence, and those who look beyond that to the spiritual.

Now everything that goes with the flesh is decaying. It's going to die. It's rotting because it's under God's curse. But to live in the Spirit means peace with God and life to come.

[14 : 26] And we get to verses 9-11 and Paul explains just how the Spirit brings life. He says, you either have the Spirit or you don't. You either belong to Christ or you don't. If you have the Spirit, Paul explains, that you're not in the realm of the flesh.

In other words, your flesh doesn't own you anymore. It doesn't control you anymore. Now even though we have a physical body with flesh and blood, he explains in verse 10, in spite of that, you will live because you have the Spirit dwelling in you and the Spirit brings life.

Now how or what does he mean? Is he talking about spiritual life and out-of-body life in another realm? Well, we do have a new spiritual life in Christ. But really, what he is referring to mostly here is that we're going to have a real physical life.

Rather than being rid of our bodies in the end, those bodies are going to be redeemed. And this is the whole purpose of these verses. The whole point in these verses and the whole what the hope rests on.

And that's why Paul says elsewhere that if it was only for this life that we have no hope, or sorry, if it was only for this life that we have hope in Christ, then we of all people are to be most pitied because the hope isn't for this life.

[15 : 42] It's all in the next. It's all in the resurrection. All eggs in one basket and that's in the next life. The hope is in the resurrection. So verse 12 and following.

Why then? Would you have anything, would you want to have anything to do with conforming to this word? Focusing on our attention and setting our thoughts and such fleshly things in this life when in the end they're all just going to pass away into death.

And if we're gripped by these things then they're just going to drag us down with them. But Christ, he says, saves us from that. He frees us from slavery to sin and saves us from ourselves, me, myself and I.

And he gives us a new identity as a child of God. Having the Spirit of God in us marks us out now as belonging to him, as his children with privilege.

In the Old Testament God sat at the top of Mount Sinai in unapproachable fire whenever the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. The very feast which commemorated the giving of the law to Moses at Pentecost, that unapproachable fire came down and rested on the disciples' heads.

[16 : 59] Because of what Jesus had done, the unapproachable holy, holy, holy God would now be called Abba Father. Basically, Dada. The same kind of word that a little child would use to cry out to their daddy.

Now if you've put your trust in Christ, then this is your identity. The first verses that we looked at there in the chapter are all about the technical legality and the theology that tells us about the two identities.

There's people of the flesh and there's people of the Spirit. But if you've trusted in Christ as your Savior and your King, then this is where you are now. You're identified with God as his Son, as one who has the Spirit of God inside them.

Because of Jesus' death, you have forgiveness, you have no condemnation, freedom from sin, freedom from self, to have a new identity and a new relationship.

One where God becomes our Father and our protector and our provider and the one that we live to please and enjoy. So like Christ, if we love him and know him and accepted him as our Savior, then we are God's sons, his children.

[18 : 17] And like Christ, we will be raised from death. And that's where the hope lies. So verses 18 to 30, secondly then, let's look a little bit at the hope and what that means for us in an uncertain world.

Well, verse 18, well, Paul says the main consequence is that when you think about the hope for the future and you think about today's troubles, whatever they might be, they're not even worth bothering comparing to what is coming.

The pure glory of what's going to happen to us as our broken bodies get fixed and our troubled minds are finally and completely calmed and every sin which bothered us is finally taken away or removed.

Every pain and every hurt is gone. That will be the greatest demonstration of God's work in all its glory. The redemption of the creation and particularly us the redemption of his prize.

He says it's not worth comparing even the greatest troubles in life that we might have and he had plenty. He says even in verses 19 to 22 even the creation looks on in anticipation to see what's going to happen to us as we're fully transformed into the children of God.

[19 : 33] The creation can't wait. Since the fall everything in the entire creation from stars to shellfish has been suffering because of our sin. Everything from massive tsunamis to hurricanes to myxomatosis and little bunny rabbits can be traced back to the first human decision to rebel against the creator.

The creation didn't decide to sin. It didn't rebel against its creator. Animals didn't decide to rebel against their creator. But Paul reminds us that God chose to frustrate the entire world and any hope for humanity.

God frustrated the creation so that it might play its part in the redemption of humanity in the hope that the creation itself would one day be set free and share in the freedom and redemption with the caretakers that it was originally created to have.

That's the hope for the world around us. Verse 18 to 22 and then 23 to 30 we have the hope for the child of God. Now it's not just the creation that wants the redemption to come.

We should too. We must do if we have the spirit of God in us. Not that we'd want to give up on life or want it all to be over or wish it all away but there's something in us that just wants it all to be fixed.

[20 : 54] Instead of having a fearful expectation of judgment to come after death there's a desire for everything to be made new for us to be made new. And specifically here of looking forward to redemption of our bodies as we gain the full benefits of sonship.

As Christians a huge amount of our time is spent in demonstrating God's redemption to the world now. Good deeds transforming society where we can.

Having a good or a redemptive influence on someone else's life. And most of all sharing the good news of Jesus with others. I know even though we can hope for some kind of redemption in the world around us and we should just as we are described as first risk we should also hope for fruit in the world but really ultimately the real hope is as just in the last point isn't for now but it's all eggs in one basket and it's all for the life to come.

Hope through Christ beyond the grave. Verse 24 because it's this hope that we're saved. No hope in results for the transformation of the community or society or even results for our church that is not what our hope is in.

Our saving hope cannot even be seen in this life he says. In fact Paul says the hope that is seen is no hope at all. It's no hope for something that we can actually envisage getting hold of in this life or something more of what we already know.

[22 : 28] it's hope for something that we don't have yet and we have to read right up until the end patiently he says until we can claim it. Until then the spirit will help us even in our prayers.

Verse 26 And he's not talking about tongues here so much but he's talking about like before some kind of a holy attitude of discontent where we know that we need to pray and we know that there's something not right in our lives and we're not content with the way the world is around us and we just want to change but we don't even know what to say or where to start or how to pray about it. The Holy Spirit is interceding for us and groaning in our behalf. That's what Paul's talking about because it's all in the context of hope and change.

The spirit is inside us and he's changing us and transforming us as we look forward to the day when everything is going to be completely restored. In all things we know that God is working and will work for the good of those who love him.

And it all comes back to that initial trust and faith. If we have faith and trust in him to save us and guide us in our lives then we have the spirit in us and we know that there is a future for us.

[23 : 53] we have been called according to his purpose. He knew us and he loved us from the beginning and he gave us the destiny of being like Jesus predestined according to the likeness of his son.

That means our destiny is to be like Jesus. The day is coming when we will see Jesus face to face along with many others like ourselves and he says it will be glorious.

That's the future that we hope for. So finally then what is the response? And what should our response be for 2013 as we face change and uncertainty and trouble and pain in the world around us and in ourselves?

Verses 31 to 39 the response is confidence. God subjected his entire creation to futility and decay. He sent his son to rescue us in our hopeless state.

He set out a whole plan of redemption for us in a new creation. Verse 31 then if God wants good for us and loves us and went to such length to redeem us if he really has this eternal plan for our little lives then no change or trouble is ever going to upset that.

[25 : 05] If he has already sent his son to die to bring this whole plan into action and bring this hope to reality then he's not going to just decide now that he wants to give up on it all and not bring us to redemption or bring us everything that he's promised to give us.

No one can bring any charge no one can condemn Jesus has died and he has risen again so that we will die and we will rise again with him.

So nothing he says will separate us from God's love and his plan for us. No financial difficulty not even to the point of nakedness no slugging or work at school even to the point of physical persecution no danger no threat not even death itself will thwart his plan or separate us from being loved and loving him as our father forever.

Paul finishes by explaining I'll just read out the verses for I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So when you look in the mirror on Monday night or consider your finances or worry about the future or your children's future or just feel some fear of what might lie ahead remember the hope of the redemption and the hope of the resurrection that one day it's all coming the world is changing our bodies are changing but no matter what happens if the Holy Spirit lives in you through faith in Christ then nothing will change the plan that God has for you and nothing will stop the changes that God has set in motion for his creation the creation will be changed we will be changed and we can be sure that our hope will not be disappointed Amen Thanks so much