

# A New Year

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[0:00] It's one of hope. We review what's come before, what might come up in the future. We see people hoping for better if the previous year hasn't been great. We hope that we stay! on that winning streak if 2015 was a good one for us. I think that's part of the reason that we have New Year's resolutions. I'm slightly cynical. I think New Year's resolutions are more about hope than they are about effort. On the 1st of January, we hope that our New Year's resolution will carry on until the middle of March and not four days into January.

Hope at New Year can be a bit uncertain. We don't know what's going to happen this year. If you're anything like me, perhaps 2016 is already looking a lot like 2015.

But as we come to Romans 5 today, at the beginning of this new year, it's on page 1132 if you've put your Bibles down. I hope and I trust that we will see a hope which is certain. A hope which isn't subject to the unknown, but a hope that is rooted in God's loving action to us in Christ.

I trust and pray that this will warm our hearts and encourage us as we go on to live for this year in Christ. We have three points this morning and the first one is this. A hope to boast about. A hope to boast about.

A hope to rejoice in. Paul starts this section, chapter 5 verse 1. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

[2:01] We've been justified. We currently stand in grace. And essentially, this is what Paul has been building up to for the whole of Romans up to this point. Chapter 1 verse 17, we see that he's going to explain the gospel which contains the righteousness of God and which is experienced by faith.

And after this comes a long diagnosis of the human problem. Mankind has chosen to live lives divorced from their creator. They choose to worship other things rather than the God who made them.

We flaunt God's law. We do not live as he wishes. There's no advantage for being a Jew or a Gentile. Because Paul concludes in Romans 3 verse 22.

There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. At this point in Romans, this is where we all stand.

A thoroughly hopeless situation. Everyone falling short. I don't know what the idea of sin is in your head. Maybe because he's just had Christmas.

[3:12] It's Santa's naughty list. Minor misdemeanors. But for Paul, it's falling well short of the glorious, wonderful majesty of God, our creator, who we have abandoned.

We're on the archery range. We miss the mark. It's not minor misdemeanors. It's completely missing the target of God's holiness. But, in chapter 3, and it's an amazing but.

First, I'll read on. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely, but have been justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. But here in Romans 3, we see a switch. We were utterly guilty, fallen, fallen far short of the glory of God.

And because of this, facing his judgment, God's wrath poured out back in chapter 1. But now, the consequences of our sin have been freely removed.

[4:29] We've been justified and we're in a law court, authoritatively declared not guilty. And all this is because of the death of Jesus Christ in our place.

We'll go back to chapter 5, where we're landing today. And because the charges against us have been paid by Jesus, we are now not guilty of all the wrong that we have done, of completely missing God's mark.

We now have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We were once enemies with God, but now the war is over. We can cross the battle lines to be with God.

Once enemies, now friends. We have been justified, declared not guilty, gaining access to God's forgiveness that is there for us in Christ through faith.

And so, at the end of verse 2, therefore we've been justified and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[5:40] Let's unpack this a little bit. The word rejoice is a very interesting word. It pops up quite a lot throughout our passage, the idea of rejoicing, boasting, glorying.

Or as one commentator puts it, which I really like, it means living with our heads held high. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

We live with our heads held high at the hope of the glory of God. Hope for the glory of God.

What does that mean? Well, it's hope of the day where God will be seen for who he truly is. The word glory basically means weight, worth, value.

We're looking forward to the day where we get to see God as he really is when he returns. When Christ comes back and we see God as he is.

[6:58] Of course, this makes complete sense. We've just seen what Paul's been building up to. And we've seen a picture of a God who we have treated awfully and yet freely justifies us.

Of course, we're going to want to see who he is. We want to see him as he really is. Of course, when Christ comes, all suffering, all pain, all evil in this world will be cast away.

But what Paul says we are to hope for, what we stand up with our heads held high for, is hope of seeing God as he really is. Our loving God who has justified us.

This is our hope. God coming to the world and us seeing him as he is. If we have been justified through trusting in what Christ did for us at the cross, what we've been singing about, that amazing love poured out for us, which we will explore later, then we can look forward to the day where God returns and we see him as he is.

This is the Christian hope. And as we move on to chapter three, we see that this standing of our head held high applies even when we are suffering.

[8:30] I'll read it out. We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance, perseverance, character.

And character, hope. Verses three and four act a little bit like a flow chart. We start with suffering and the end result is hope for God's glory.

It's important that we lift the bonnet up on this, that we see what Paul's saying. Suffering... When suffering comes along, there is a wrestling with our circumstances.

We struggle with what is happening. But as we suffer and this struggle carries on, it produces perseverance as we try to follow God.

As we cling to the foot of the cross, no matter what, in the midst of horrible trials and temptations, it produces perseverance. Perseverance. And as we cling to the foot of the cross, persevering, it produces character.

[9:39] We rationalize our circumstances. We think about them with a gospel mindset. As we cling to the foot of the cross, our gospel character, the truth and the beauty of the gospel shaping us, develops.

And as we have gospel character, then we long for the day that Christ returns even more. I think it's important that this is here in verses three and four, because hope can quickly get derailed by suffering.

But this is massively encouraging. Paul's not just saying we grin and bear our sufferings in a typical British fashion. We don't just kind of suck it up.

No, instead, as we suffer, what is being produced in us is hope, a longing for seeing God as he really is.

As we hold on to Jesus in our suffering and we persevere, as our character develops, as we think through the gospel. It is hard. And we will see that Paul knew this better than anyone.

[10:58] But as we suffer, we look forward to the day where we see God as he truly is. Suffering ultimately produces hope.

It does not undermine our future hope, but actually makes us long for it even more. I've suffered relatively little in my life.

I realize being 22 and saying this to a room full of people can often appear like I don't really know what I'm talking about. And so for me, it's a great comfort that I wasn't the one who wrote Romans. The man who wrote Romans was Paul, a man who was beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, slandered, run out of town for the sake of the gospel.

Romans is written by a sensitive pastor. He knows that as we suffer, as we face hardships, it's not easy. But in the gloom of our suffering, if we cling to Christ, then we are being built into people who long for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and seeing God as he truly is even more.

[12:17] Okay. So we have a hope. But where does the certainty for this hope come from? Does this certainty and this hope of seeing God, does it really stand up to close examination?

Paul says, we can be certain, we can live in hope with our heads held high rejoicing because God's love has been poured into our hearts because of God's love.

The hope that we have will not disappoint. It will not put us to shame.

We will not be left out in the cold when Jesus returns because Christians have experienced God's amazing love as the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts.

The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee of his love for us. He's our deposit, our seal, our experience of God's love. He gives us new life. Romans chapter 8, he allows us to relate to God as our father.

[13:23] We will not be put to shame because when we are justified by faith, we experience God's love and the spirit is within us. Often when suffering or sin come along or just general life causes me to drift, the question I want is one of assurance and Paul begins the answer in verse 5 because God has poured his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

I want assurance and Paul's going to answer that in our next point. A love for those who now have hope. Where is my assurance? Well, it is in God's great love which has been shown for me.

Verses 6 and 10 are amazing verses. They tell us of God's love but they are also a definitive proof. The love for God is in our hearts, verse 5.

What does this love look like? I mean, I want it with foundations made of concrete, reinforced and well designed if it's going to be the thing that I place my hope in and the thing I'm longing for and that I'm going to suffer for.

So why is it that this love will not disappoint? Why will I stand when Christ returns if I have my faith in him?

[14:46] Well, Paul's answer is all based on the character and act of God shown in Christ. Let's read this out. You see, at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners Christ died for us. And since we have now been justified by his blood how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

See, God's love is shown at the foot of the cross in Christ's death. And Christ died on the cross for us when there was absolutely no hope for us.

There was nothing we could do for ourselves. We were powerless. People will not logically die for anyone except for a good person a good cause on rare occasions.

[15:58] No one, however gives up their lives for sinners. That is radical outrageous love. No one dies for their enemies which is what we were to God.

And this is exactly Paul's point. Romans is a book of big butts and here is another one. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

Although it made no sense whilst we were his enemies powerless nothing that we could do that is when Christ died for us.

This is the nature of the love of God. Radical completely illogical dying for his enemies.

And this is how we were justified. If our sins were dealt with when we were God's enemies whilst we were unreconciled to him if God does this for his enemies now that we are adopted and as Romans 8 says we can call God Father how much more will we be saved from God's wrath now?

[17:27] We were saved when we were his enemies now that we're his children well there's almost no comparison of course we are saved of course we will stand.

it's utterly ludicrous to think that God would just abandon us that the hope that he put in our hearts by grace and by faith could fail for any reason God is not into friendly fire we were his enemies and he saved us now that we're on his team well our hope is not going to disappoint us no we are God's dearly beloved children through Christ by faith in his death on the cross and this will not be changed we are looking forward to seeing our father his glory and his worth and our hope for that is completely and utterly certain when Christ returns we will not be left disappointed left out in verse 10 how much more have we sorry let me start you we were saved when we were

God's enemies and so in verse 10 how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved how much more can you be saved than how much you were saved when you were God's enemy if you like we're now super certain super assured super hopeful that should be the position in which we're standing and that's our application in the midst of life in the midst of suffering in the midst of drifting just through life our hope clinging to it pointing our heads to it the hope that we have will not fail for those who live by faith those who live with our heads held high pointed at the return of Christ which shows the glory of God we can be utterly assured because we are loved by God unimaginably incredibly undeservedly that he would send his son for us hope at the beginning of a new year is often very fragile the resolution might work but in all real probability it will fail if you're as lazy as I am it will definitely fail it might have already failed already this year could be incredibly hard this year could be great but the hope of the

Christian having been loved and justified fully by Christ having been loved when we were God's enemy well that is a hope that will not fail so it makes sense to hold on to that hope to remind ourselves of that hope to live lives centred around that hope it is the one certain thing that we hope for it is one of the certainties of life that when God returns we will stand that we are justified and forgiven I know I spend a lot of time slating off new year's resolutions this sermon but how about as a Christian we make a resolution to focus our eyes on the hope that we have focusing our eyes on the joy that will be ours when we see God as he is focusing our eyes on what

Christ did for us preaching this gospel to ourselves every day not just walking through our quiet time if we have one not just absentmindedly floating up a prayer but really getting stuck in to reminding ourselves every day of the hope we have of the certainty of the joy of being loved by God this much maybe that's a resolution that might be worth making this year maybe it's a resolution you could keep one another accountable to that you ask how are you doing rejoicing having your head held high pointed to the hope that is yours in Christ well as we finish we have one final point maybe we're thinking this is wonderful this is all great but the future hope maybe does seem a little bit far off what about in the here and now so as we finish we're going to look at verse 11 not only is this so so there

[22:55] Paul is talking about the future hope that we have not only is this future hope so certain but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation see as Christians we stand as reconciled people here and now God loves us now yes it secures for us a future certain hope but we are his children now this comes with it this comes the benefits of praying to our heavenly father of having his word and having him speak to us we get the blessings now we get to know and rejoice in God and the wonderful fact that he loves us now see many people in the world have a nagging pull within them saying that something is wrong mankind stands in a state of unease people have uncertainty people have an emptiness which comes from being out of right relationship with their creator people don't know what will happen after they die and so lives are spent flitting around here there and

everywhere trying to cram as much in however for the

Christian we are reconciled now and our future hope the certainty we have influences how we live now we rejoice now there is an assurance in the gospel which is not found anywhere else in the world and it's real now see we no longer have to treat God as an unknown quantity as if he's going to smite us at any minor fault and so we rejoice we have peace with God and know him as our father that's not normal in our world to know with certainty God rejoice we are not legalists who stay awake at night burdened by the guilt of our actions because we have been justified and reconciled rejoice although that being said that is not therefore a license to use forgiveness as a credit card but we are not legalists we do not live under fear and under pressure no because of the love that God has shown us in

Christ's death on the cross reconciling us to him for those who cry out to Jesus for forgiveness well there is assurance and we are washed clean and our heads are held high we rejoice we live with our chests out and our shoulders back no guilt no second guessing no fretting for those with faith see this new year there is a real and solid hope it is found in the amazing love of God and this changes how we live now we have received reconciliation now what a joy for the new year what a wonderful assurance I'll finish with two things the first are you someone who is in 2016 decided to find God and maybe this is your first time at a church maybe you've been coming to church for a while and you hold God at arm's length does the promise of a certain hope being reconciled to the God who made you having guilt removed for all the things that you have done living a new life which is certain and joyful does that resonate with you if it does God is willing to justify to forgive to pour his love into your heart if you cast your trust and your faith upon Jesus Christ he offers a certain hope for the future and peace for now it's there waiting for you if you are someone who's been struck by what's been said about the certainty of hope that comes from Christ and if this is you please speak to someone at this church about what it means to live with Christ as your saviour and your lord and if you are a Christian then I pray that 2016 will be a year where you and I will live with assurance with our eyes focused with our heads held up necks rolled back looking at the hope that we have this new year may we all focus on the hope of the glory of God won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ Amen Let me pray Heavenly Father we thank you for the comforts that there are in your words we thank you for the letters to the Romans where we see the gospel explained and made clear and we see your love for us that whilst we were still sinners whilst we were powerless Christ died for us Heavenly Father from my weak and faltering words please burn away any of the rubbish and leave the gold of your word behind that we would take it and apply it that we would live as changed people who long to see you more and more in the hope that we have in seeing your glory help us now as we sing your praises as we finish as we enjoy fellowship together Heavenly Father we praise you and glorify you Amen Amen we're going to finish by singing ending