

New Life: The Hope of Glory

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[0 : 0 0] Well, welcome to St. John's on this snowy day, and I want you to know I think it's because of the snowy emergency that the clergy are doing these sung responses, and that's probably God's grace that I'm preaching and not leading the service today, so you don't have to listen to me sing those responses. Very good job, Keith, singing. This passage is one of those glorious passages of Scripture that fill you with hope as you read it. It sets our eyes, the eyes of our hearts, on the joy that is before us, and it's transforming. It transforms us. The Holy Spirit, who pervades this chapter, also works through God's Word to give us this life-changing hope, and we need those words of God because if you are a Christian, you live in a strange time. I want to draw your attention to the front of the bulletin. This is a marvelous illustration that David Short created, so I'll give him all the credit for this, and it shows to us that we live in an overlap of the ages. So if you see that little person running there, that's you and it's me if you have faith in Christ, and we live in the old age still, our world at the bottom left hand of law, sin, and death, but we also live in a new age because Jesus has come. He has filled us with his Spirit.

There is righteousness, glory, life, and the Holy Spirit that characterize this time. And the time has started because Jesus came, he died, and he rose again, and he sent, God sent his Holy Spirit to us. So at the same time that we are experiencing God's grace and goodness, we are experiencing the results of sin. We die. We continue to sin. We struggle with it. Our bodies let us down. We experience suffering in that body, even though Jesus is renewing us from the inside out.

And so what we are learning in this passage is how do we live? How do we journey in this time of God already giving us his goodness, but not completely yet, in this time where we still experience the results of sin? Well, Paul tells us a number of things in this passage, but I want to sort of simplify it down to three things. He tells us who you are and who I am in Jesus, and then he tells us what our future is in Jesus, and he talks about how to journey through this already not yet time with Jesus. And it fills us with strength to do it. So look at verse 14.

Paul says there in 14 that everyone, all men and women, boys and girls who are led by the Spirit of God, that is, they've been set free by the Holy Spirit to love and obey God and worship Jesus, all of these are sons of God. Now, that's an important term because in the Old Testament, Son of God means the people who belong to him and people who have been chosen by God.

And I want to read to you from Deuteronomy 7 because it is a beautiful passage of how God chooses his people. It says this, it says, the Lord God, speaking to Israel, has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession. Out of all the people who are on the face of the earth, it was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the nations. But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to the fathers that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery. You see, God is speaking to his people. He's saying that I chose you to be the thing that I cherish most, not because you were deserving, in fact, far from it, you were the fewest, the less powerful of all nations. But the reason he did that was because he set his love on them and chose them. Now, this is what Jesus does for us. This is exactly who you and I are in him. God, in his love for you, chooses you to be his treasured possession. Not because I deserve it or you deserve it, but because, very simply, he set his love on you. Jesus died for you on a cross and he chose you. And that is the fundamental reality for everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ.

[5 : 1 8] And there may well be some of you today, even coming through the snow this morning, whom God is choosing now, but you haven't yet trusted Jesus for his grace. As you read this passage, this is the time to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, for a new life, the new life that comes from belonging to him. A couple of weeks ago, we had baptisms at 11. And baptisms

are wonderful, wonderful for us to see because in them, the minister at the after the baptism does the sign of the cross on the person who has been baptized on their forehead. And they use those words that I sign you with the sign of the cross and mark you as Christ's own forever. That is the gift of Jesus.

When we are united to him, we belong to God. God's love and acceptance of us is made effective in our life. And there is an incredible contrast. If you look at verse 15, between the old life without Jesus to a life of belonging to God, look at verse 15, you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. And that fear is of God's judgment on sin. Instead, you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father. That is a verse for us to memorize and to remember always because here's the blessing of all blessings. This is the absolute assurance of God's love that Jesus has given to us. It is the truth of belonging to God. When Paul says that we cry, he is talking about a loud shout of a loud voice of confidence from deep within us that the Holy Spirit gives to us. He gives this deep assurance that we belong to him, that God is indeed what Paul emphasized is here. He is our Abba.

He is our Father. This is what God, the gospel of God is all leading to, that we would know this truth in our lives. Our Jewish neighbors who share our duplex next to us are visited almost daily by their children and their grandchildren. And the grandchildren are kids who are the same age as our kids. And we often talk to them because they are over a lot. Now the little children call their dad Abba. And the adults call their dad Abba as well. And it is wonderful to hear because it brings home the significance of this verse. It is a deeply trusting thing for a person to call God Abba. In Jesus, there is the certainty that God is your Abba, your loving Father who delights in you and me. His love for you is constant.

He is near and will never let you go. And a right relationship of a child with their father is an image that helps us to understand this massive change that has happened. That we have gone from being under God's wrath to knowing in the depths of who we are that we belong to our heavenly Father. That is the power of the gospel. That's what it means to be united to Jesus. We actually share with Jesus a relationship of knowing God as our Father. And that's why when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark records him as saying these exact words, repeating, Abba, Father. Every time Jesus spoke to his Father, he began by saying Abba. And that's why when he taught his disciples to pray, how did he teach them? He said, start out by saying Abba, our Father who is in heaven.

[9 : 43] And what Jesus was teaching there is that when you are united to Jesus, he brings you into his own relationship with God the Father by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. And you know, this truth is something that is beyond us in one way, but something very practical also happens to us when the Holy Spirit causes us to cry Abba, Father. Because that cry is prayer. And the thing that we need to see here is that in that verse, we are seeing how God frees us to pray. In verse 16, it says, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. You see, God is opening our minds so that we can pray.

We can only pray rightly if the Holy Spirit teaches our hearts and our minds that God is our Father and that we are his children by the grace of adoption. That is what he does for you. And so for you and me, praying to God our Father is the great gift that we have. It is the practical gift that is of immense and immeasurable value. Yet it is a gift that is easy if, and I'm speaking from my own experience, it's a very easy gift to not unwrap. It is a gift that we leave wrapped. And this is something that we that we need to allow the motivation of the Holy Spirit to overcome in us. Because what we are learning here is that God has drawn near to me in Jesus. He has called us to speak, to respond to him.

And he calls us to pray to him. How can I not praise him for his greatness or tell him of my life along with my needs and my concerns? How can I not seek his wisdom or receive his forgiveness when he has brought me into this relationship where I cry out, Abba, Father?

What prayer is doing is it is actually expressing in our lives that we are indeed adopted children of God. So my hope is that this is a great encouragement for you to pray, to see the gift of being able to call on God as our Father in prayer. Because that expression of who we are says this is our true identity, adopted children of God. Jim Packer writes in *Knowing God* that you sum up the whole of the New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's Holy Father. And we are assured of this by the Holy Spirit who opens our mouth and our heart to pray. It's a present assurance that is a great strength to us as we journey through this in-between time, experiencing

being filled with the Spirit and dealing with the fact of sin and death in our bodies. We can pray. This is who we are, children of God. Now the second thing that this passage does, besides telling us who we are in Christ, is it strengthens us by revealing our future. Look at verse 17. It says this, If we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Now notice that he repeats the word heir three times.

[13 : 31] That's a signal from Paul for us to pay attention because he's telling us that there is an inheritance that awaits all whom God has adopted. And it is an inheritance of God, as he says. In other words, it consists of what God has promised to us. And we see those promises throughout the Old Testament.

We heard Keith read it at the beginning of the service. Right through the Old Testament, there is a promise of God's grace and his goodness to come in very, very powerful ways where he makes things right. And that inheritance is one that not only is what God promised, but it is also a fellow inheritance with Christ. Jesus already possesses that inheritance. And when we are united to him, that takes away all our uncertainty. We will, in fact, partake of it in Jesus Christ. And the question is, what is the inheritance? Well, strangely, it is that we will suffer first with Christ. That is a downside of the inheritance. Jesus suffered the weaknesses and pains and death of the body.

We will suffer this with him. This is what happens first. Jesus was suffered and was rejected because of his gospel. We also suffer and are rejected as we follow him. This is temporary. And the suffering is more than just the persecutions that come because we follow Christ. It is all the things that Paul talked about in that marvelous reading from 2 Corinthians, which is sort of Murphy's law. You know, everything bad that could happen to Paul did happen. You know, shipwrecked, being cold, being hungry, being persecuted, experiencing rejection and betrayal. Everything, creation, humanity, came against him, it would seem, in his life. That was part of his inheritance. But after the suffering, clearly, clearly, that is temporary, we will be glorified with Christ. That is a permanent glory.

And what will it look like to be glorified with Christ? Jesus in his glory. Jesus' great glory was his obedience to God on the cross and his resurrection from the dead to be Lord over all. And so that is a hint of our own glory. Glory is hard for us to look into because we cannot see it yet. But we have a clue here. It has something to do with obeying God. C.S. Lewis, I think, put it very well in a sermon called The Weight of Glory. And I recommend that sermon to you because it is a very helpful reflection on glory. But in it, he says this. He says, the promise of glory is the promise to please God, to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness, to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in.

[16 : 34] As an artist delights in his work or a father delights in a son. It seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is. And that's very true. What Paul is leading us into here is glory that our thoughts can't contain. It's impossible for our minds to wrap our minds around glory. It's a weight so great that Paul considers the sufferings of this present time, as intense as they might be, not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. But to please God perfectly in a new body, that is what glory will be like. It is extraordinary to even contemplate. But that's what Paul lays out to us in this passage. And it is a glory that is so powerful and compelling that Paul says even creation is drawn to it. Look at verses 19. It's an amazing turn that Paul takes here. Every verse is about creation. It says that creation is waiting with eager longing to see the glory of the sons of God revealed. And the reason creation desires this so strongly is because when Adam and Eve sinned, humanity and the world along with humanity began to suffer death and corruption of that which God made good. But when God subjected creation to futility, he did it in hope, in the certainty that there was a plan that he would set free from bondage to corruption, creation, and that creation would share the glory of the children of God.

God. When you look at creation, you see hints of this. You see what creation was meant to be, what God might be bringing it towards. Last Friday, actually only two days ago, it seems like a long time ago, I took my son to Grouse Mountain for a ski lesson. It was a glorious, crisp, sunny day. And one of those days where you could see unlimited vision. And so at the top of Grouse Mountain, you could see the panorama of God's creation. You could see majestic mountains. You could see sun that was reflecting off the water.

You saw trees covered with snow. You saw this glory of creation, a tiny glimmer of the great glory that God will actually transform creation into. I was riding up on a ski lift with three snowboarders

who were teenagers and an interesting conversation. I don't know if they were devout Christians, but I doubt it.

But on the way up, they said, you know, I look at the slope and I see God's touch, you know, and those were the exact words this guy used. Look at that slope. It's God's touch. And so there is this glimmer of the great glory that God will give to creation. But at the same time that I was looking at that view, the world was convulsing itself in New Zealand and buildings were crumbling. People were dying because of creation.

And so you see that there is this cycle of birth and decay in creation that creation is groaning to get out of, to come into the day of glory, the day of goodness, when God will transform for eternity, not only our resurrection bodies, but also this earth will be transformed as well to its restored, resurrected state where there's no more death or decay. It's something that we cannot wrap around our minds around, but we see glimpses of it. Like our own glory, we can't comprehend it.

[20 : 43] We know that it is true. So why does Paul teach us this? How does that certain hope of glory affect us as we live, as we journey in this overlap of two ages with death and suffering, and yet the new life of Jesus, where the Holy Spirit lives in us, and we know the joy of belonging to God our Father?

Well, very briefly, first it means that God's plan for the world and for us is very, very big. There is much in store for us. And verse 23 says that we groan who have first fruits of the spirits.

We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. In other words, there's much more to adoption than what we experience right now.

The broken relationships, our physical pains and weakness, the sadness and loss that come from living in this fallen world are temporary. But the promised glory we do not see is of such a weight that we cannot compare the two things. Glory is eternal. God will completely free us from our suffering.

And all suffering will be taken away at the coming of Jesus Christ. Even the suffering that is in creation itself, that will be taken away. And so this is a strong comfort in our sorrow. The light of glory in this passage surrounds any darkness of suffering that we experience in our life in the in-between time.

[22 : 21] But not only does this passage comfort us, it teaches us to live a life of waiting eagerly. This is the way Paul puts it. And waiting eagerly means very simply living for the things that last. It means seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness. That is what is lasting. Paul is saying that is what has true weight in your life and my life. And so he's calling us to be strengthened by glory. Look at verse 25. It says, if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. And that word with patient means an active waiting. That means bearing up under intense pressure the things that pressure us in this world.

Paul is saying that as we thank God for our hope of glory, as we hold on to it, as we meditate on it, as we think about this inheritance we have that we share with Christ, that we are strengthened to withstand temptation to despair. We are strengthened not to give in to the thinking of the world. We are strengthened to see God and his plan for us, even in the midst of failing and sin in our lives.

That's why I think Hebrews 12 is so helpful for us, because Jesus himself lived this way. He understood, of course, he saw very clearly what glory is. And he said this, Hebrews says this, we see, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. This is the Christian life as well, that we have in our minds the vision that is before us, the joy that is set before us, the glory that God has for us.

So that we can look at life in the same way that Isaiah did, and to think in the same way that we heard our service this morning start with. And it's from Isaiah 25, 9. It will be said on that day, the day of glory, behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for him. And you can say, we waited for him eagerly. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Amen.

Amen.