

Hope for Peace with God

Romans 5:6-11

One of the great explorers of the early 20th century was a man named Sir Earnest Shackleton. (Picture) Shackleton driven by the ambition to explore the continent of Antarctica and, according to what I found online, there was one goal in particular that captured his interest and that was to make the first land crossing of the Antarctic continent. So in about 1910 he began putting together an expedition to do that. It was a very dangerous journey because of the extreme conditions, but he devised a plan that he felt would make it possible and they embarked on a ship in the fall of 1914. (Picture)

Unfortunately, before making landfall, the ship became completely trapped in ice while still at sea. The crew waited with the ship for several months, hoping it would eventually break free, but it didn't. It was crushed and sunk. The expedition was over and now it became a matter of survival. (Picture) 28 men were stranded and survived for several more months living in makeshift camps on the floating ice. (Picture) But when the weather began to warm up the ice began to break, and they were forced to load three lifeboats to try to reach solid ground. Under miserably cold and wet conditions they finally made landfall at the uninhabited and desolate Elephant Island, which was rarely visited and provided no hope of rescue. The physical condition of many of the men had depleted so much that they were unable to continue, so Shackleton took 5 healthy men with him in one of the lifeboats and embarked on an 800 mile perilous journey to the nearest inhabited island to get help.

After 3 intensely miserable weeks at sea, with bitterly cold temperatures and the biggest waves Shackleton had ever seen, they miraculously made it to land, but they still had to make a dangerous trek across mountains and glaciers to the nearest inhabited whaling station. (Picture) It took 36 hours of walking, much of it through the dark, without a detailed map and in treacherous conditions, but they made it. From there they set out to rescue the 22 men they had left on Elephant Island. Three attempts were made. The first two were unsuccessful because of ice, but on the third attempt the seas opened up and they were able to rescue all 22 men. (Picture)

From the time their ship was trapped in the ice to the final rescue on Elephant Island it was a period of almost 2 years. Imagine living in a tent on a frozen landscape in a Wisconsin winter far worse than anything we've ever seen, and

doing that *for two years*... Imagine going for a 3 week boat ride on the ocean in those conditions that were so wet and cold that everything was covered with thick ice. How did they keep going? Why didn't they give up? One of the guys had to have his foot amputated because of frostbite and gangrene. They had to eat their pets and sled dogs. Oftentimes they were soaking wet in temperatures far below zero in gale force winds...

When you've been through difficult conditions for a long period of time and haven't yet made it to the other side, there's one thing that's critical to keep you going. It's something beyond your basic survival needs of food, water, and shelter. It's something even more important than our need for companionship. There's something more that we need in order to maintain a positive outlook and not give in to a desperate pit of discouragement and despair... When times are tough and the end is not yet in sight, the only way we're going to continue to endure and not give up is if we have HOPE...

Shackleton and his crew had their basic needs met and they had each other, but the only way they could keep going was because they continued to have hope – hope that they would eventually make it through; hope of rescue; hope that that better days would come again. They didn't give up because they still had hope. Hope is the fuel that keeps the fire burning when times are tough. Hope is the power that keeps the engine running. Hope is the refreshing drink of water to the weary worker on a hot and humid day. William Shakespeare said, "The miserable have no other medicine but only hope."

Hope is essential for us to make it through this life, especially in difficult times. 2020 has been a year that we've all had to face ongoing, difficult circumstances. In a normal year we have various difficulties related to personal circumstances, but this year, on top of that, we've had to deal with the difficulties caused by the pandemic and society's responses to it. All of us have been affected in various ways and it's been going on for 9 months with no definite end in sight. Division between people has escalated due to COVID, elections and racial conflicts. Beyond that we can see that the spiritual condition of our nation seems to be getting worse and worse all the time. And we're about to embark on a long Wisconsin winter! How are we going to keep going?

I've run into a lot of people who are struggling with hopelessness, discouragement and depression right now and I've experienced a good portion of it myself. There seems to be a downward pull that we constantly have to fight

against. How are we going to keep our heads up and continue to endure? How are we going to keep looking ahead and moving forward?

We need hope! And we need a hope that never fails no matter what happens to us in this world. It needs to be a hope that's grounded on something that won't give out. Part of the difficulty of this past year is that we often set our hope on the things of this world and many of them have been taken away and our hope has quickly dissolved with them. We need to set our hope on something much stronger that can't be moved no matter what we face.

Where are we going to find that kind of hope? We are about to enter a season that reminds us of where that hope comes from. The greatest hope-giving reality in all of history is that the eternal Son of God became a man and entered into this cold, dark world to bring us hope. In writing about this reality, John said: *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"* (John 1:4-5). That's hope! That's we need – especially right now.

Jesus Christ can give us the hope that we need. He is the light in the darkness that cannot be overcome. He is a rock that cannot be shaken, a foundation that will stand secure, an anchor that will never break loose. And as we enter this Christmas season and approach the celebration of his birth, I want to focus our thoughts on the ways he brings us that kind of hope. Our hope in Christ is founded on concrete realities that he's given for us to experience, and if we can fasten our hope securely to him, we will be able to weather any storm that comes our way.

In the next three weeks I am going to draw our attention to three ways that Christ gives us hope that is secure. All three are important and necessary to make our hope secure. Today I want to look at the hope Jesus gives us through peace with God, and in the next two weeks we'll look at how he gives us hope for purpose in this life and hope for eternal life in heaven. In order to embrace the hope Christ gives us through peace with God we are going to study Romans 5:6-11.

First, I want you to think how awful it is when you're in conflict with someone you care about, especially when that conflict is the result of something you've done. Maybe you've experienced that recently in the midst of all the relational tension we've been dealing with. I've been in that position before where I've done something wrong and I've hurt or offended someone. They are upset with me and

that relationship is strained. It makes me feel sick to my stomach and it's hard to focus on other things unless that conflict is resolved. It's an awful feeling.

That gives us a tiny taste of the conflict that existed between us and God because of our sin. It isn't very popular to think about how bad things were between us and God, but it's something we need to do at times in order understand the fullness of the gospel and the fullness of our hope in Christ. Things were really, really bad between us and God before Christ came into the picture. One of the clearest passages I often use to explain God's perspective on this is Ephesians 2:1-3: *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."*

From God's perspective our conflict with him was as bad as it could get. We probably didn't even know it, but we were *walking* in disobedience and sin against him, we were following the godless ways of this world, we were following Satan, we were living in the passions of our flesh and carrying out the base desires of our bodies and minds. Things were so bad in our relationship with God that he considered us to be children of wrath. This isn't just talking about 'really bad people' – this is talking about *all* of us. Things were not good between God and us. We were in extreme conflict with him because of our offenses, and we kept making it worse and worse. We destroyed our relationship with him and incurred his wrath, and there was nothing we could do to resolve it.

We were in a position of complete hopelessness. I don't care how good your life in this world might be, if you know that God is against you and there's nothing you can do about it, it destroys all hope. There is no hope. Just a sickening sense of dread and the fear of judgment.

But God didn't leave us there! He didn't want us to stay in that position of hopelessness. He wants us to be full of hope as we go through this life. So he did something amazing to make things right in our relationship with him. He gave us Jesus...

Romans 5:6-11

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one

would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Paul points out that while we were still lost in our sin and enemies with God, God intervened and demonstrated his amazing love for us by sending Jesus to die for us. 2 Cor. 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus bore all our sins on the cross and when he died, he took all the punishment and wrath we deserved. Col. 1:21-22 says, “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

By dying on the cross, Jesus completely resolved the conflict between us and God and brought perfect reconciliation in our relationship with him. That’s what Paul describes back in Romans 5:9-11: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Reconciliation is the complete restoration of our relationship with God – conflict removed; barriers gone. Instead of pending judgment we have peace with God and the promise of salvation. And because of that peace, all the benefits and blessings of a close relationship with God are ours to enjoy through faith in Christ. We receive his love and favor every moment of every day. He rejoices over us as a father over his precious sons and daughters. And he is always with us, to go through life with us – right by our side, never leaving us for a second, filling us with his Spirit, giving us his power, life and joy. Things between us and God are good, because of Jesus.

And that gives us the hope we need. Jesus gives us hope because through him we have peace with God. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There's the hope

that God is with me, the hope that God is for me, the hope my Father loves me and will never ever leave me. He'll be with me in the battle and is guaranteed to win. And the very things I'm struggling through can be used for something good. That's the kind of hope we need when we're going through difficult times. That's where hope begins, and we have that kind of hope in Jesus Christ.

When we think about what Christmas will be like this year, it might not bring us a lot of hope – cancelled events, trips, and family get togethers. Finances might be tough and there's the uncertainty of the future. If we focus on these things, we aren't going to have any hope. But maybe that's what we need. Maybe we've been focusing too much on these things and it's time for us to begin to focus much, much more on the only hope that is secure. Let the hope of Christ wash over you as you approach this Christmas season. Put your faith in him. Spend time drawing near to him and experiencing his love. Jesus has given you peace with God – your relationship with him is wide open to enjoy – and that's a hope that is eternally secure. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you, and experience the hope you need for each and every day.