

Weekly Reflection – Abounding in Hope

What is the engine of your life? What is it that influences the actions and reactions, decisions, and emotions of your life? What is it that determines how you live right here, right now? I believe it is hope. The way we often use the word hope means wishful thinking for the future but with uncertainty, but the biblical definition of hope is a life shaping certainty about something that hasn't happened yet. What you believe the future to be, your hope, will form and will determine how you live now. How you live now is determined by what you are hoping in. The anticipation, the knowledge of what's about to happen changes you, affects the way in which you are acting now. What we believe about our future is the main determining factor in how we process and how we experience and how we handle circumstances.

Victor Frankl said, "Life in a concentration camp exposes your soul's foundation. Only a few of the prisoners were able to keep their full inner liberty and inner strength. Life only has meaning in any circumstances if we have a hope that neither suffering, circumstances or death itself cannot destroy." If you put your ultimate hope into anything in this life, into your job, into your money, into your family, into your health, into your status, anything in this life; then suffering and circumstances can take it away and your life will be full of anxiety, disappointment, fear, emptiness, discouragement, discontentment, etc... The only way you're going to be able to face life under any circumstances, is if you find a way to put your ultimate hope into something that suffering and even death, can't take away, something eternal.

What you believe the future to be, your hope, will form and will determine how you live now. God wants to give us hope in something eternal, something we can anchor our lives to.

Hope from Romans 8:18-39

God Promises that Glory is coming.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18 ESV) "Glory" - what does that mean? The manifestation or displaying of God's character and His worth and His attributes. The glory of God is all of His perfections put on display. The glory of God is the infinite beauty and greatness of His manifold perfections. "Be revealed to us" I take to mean, "we will see it." You and I will experience the fullness of God's glory. That's what we were created for, to enjoy God. Sin jacked that all up. But all disciples of Jesus have hope that our future will be experiencing the fullness of God's glory.

God promises that this futile and broken world is not the end.

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope" (Romans 8:20 ESV) The point of verse 20 that I want us to see is that this futility and judgment is not God's ultimate, or final design. The words "in hope" at the end of verse 20 show that God's aim in His judicial decree of futility and pain is hope. So, when you feel almost overwhelmed by your own pain and the pain of the world, remember: this is not God's final design. Glory is coming. ***"that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:21 ESV)*** If we will trust Him then it will all be turned for our good. That's what the word "hope" means at the end of verse 20.

"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." (Romans 8:22 ESV) There is hope for something much better than the pain coming out of all this. If you are in a hospital and you hear a woman across the hall groan or scream, it makes all the difference in how you feel if you know you are on the maternity ward and not in the ICU. Why? Pain is pain, isn't it? No. Some pain leads to life. And some pain leads to death. And what verse 22 promises is that for the

children of God, all pain leads to life. All the groaning of this world are the birth pains of the kingdom of God. If you are part of the kingdom – a child of the King – all your sufferings are labor pains and not death spasms. All the pain and suffering of God’s children lead to glory.

God Promises that Our Bodies Will Be Redeemed from All Groaning

“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Romans 8:23 ESV) Listen to the way Paul sings over this truth in 1 Corinthians: ***“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”” (1 Corinthians 15:51-55 ESV)***

God is for us.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31 ESV)

All who are in Christ may say with almost unspeakable joy, “God is for us.” He is on our side. God is entirely for us, and never against us. If we are in Christ, God is for us, not against, in and through all things — all ease and all pain.

“The Solid Logic of Heaven.”

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32 ESV) It’s an argument from the greater to the lesser. The hard to the easy. When in verse 32 God the Father calls Jesus “his own Son”, the point is that there are no others and that Jesus is infinitely precious to the Father. Could God, would God, overcome His love, His affectionate bond with His Son and deliver Him over to be lied about and betrayed and abandoned, mocked, flogged, and beaten and spit on and nailed to a cross and pierced with a sword? Would the Father really pour out His wrath for my sin and your sin on His innocent Son? Would He hand over the Son of His love to die for His enemies? If He would, then whatever goal He is pursuing could never be stopped. If that greatest obstacle of His love for His Son were overcome, surely every obstacle would be overcome.

Did the Father do it? Paul’s answer is yes, and he puts it negatively and positively: ***“did not spare his own Son but gave him up.”*** In the words, “he did not spare him,” we hear the immensity of the difficulty and the obstacle. God did not delight in the pain or the dishonor of His Son. But God did not spare His Son this treatment. Instead “He gave Him up.” God was delivering His Son to death. Nothing greater has ever happened.

If God gave up his own Son, then... What? Answer: ***“How will he not also with him graciously give us all things.”*** Really? All things? If God did not withhold His Son, He will not withhold any good thing from us. Quote from John Flavel from 350 years ago: “How is it imaginable that God should withhold, after this, spirituals or temporals, from his people? How shall he not call them effectually, justify them freely, sanctify them thoroughly, and glorify them eternally? How shall he not clothe them, feed them, protect and deliver them? Surely if he would not spare his own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or

withhold from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, any comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them.”

Three questions and one answer

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? (Verse 33) Who is to condemn? (Verse 34) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Verse 35) Is there anything or anyone that can prevent this great hope from happening? ***“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39 ESV)***