

## HOPE OF GOD'S GLORY - ROMANS 5:2B

### BLESSINGS OF JUSTIFICATION #3

Captain Gerald Coffee's life dramatically changed on that day, February 3, 1966, when his plane was shot down over the China Sea. Up to this time the Vietnam War had been a necessary interruption in his life. And he flew his missions counting the months and days when he could return to his wife, Bea, and their 4 children. But now, as he saw the Vietcong soldiers coming to imprison him, he knew that his life would never be the same again.

After days of torture on the Vietnamese version of the rack, Gerald was thrown into a solitary cell. As he lay there writhing with the pain of broken bones and berating himself with guilt over having cracked, Gerald thought he heard a whisper through the wall. He inched his way over in an effort to hear more clearly. "Man in cell number 6, can you hear me?" "Yes, I can hear you" Gerald replied. "Welcome to Heartbreak Hotel. You must learn to communicate by tapping on the walls. It's the only dependable link that we have with each other."

In time, Jerry learned all of the names of the other prisoners were being held by the Vietcong. For 7 years, he received encouragement from others and gave courage back. But without question, the time each week that meant the most to Jerry was each Sunday morning. Every Sunday, the senior officer would pass a signal down the cell block for church call. Then each prisoner would stand in his cell block, if he were able, and they together would recite the 23rd Psalm. It was the only time that they talked loudly with each other. Verse 5 became especially precious to Gerald. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows." Gerald would then try to focus on the blessings of God even in such a miserable place as this, and his heart would be filled with hope that he was going to see his family and homeland once again.

Gerald wasn't aware of the peace treaty that was signed. But he did learn afterward that it was on February 3, 1973, 7 years to the day after his capture. He was soon after released to board that enormous Air Force C-141 sitting on the runway at the Hanoi Airport. After Gerald was flown out of North Vietnam, and after he had gone through all of the debriefings and physical checkups and faced all of the media cameras, he finally was able to join his family back home. He couldn't wait to attend his church the next Sunday. His pastor asked Jerry to share a short testimony of his experience. Here is what Gerald Coffee said that Sunday morning:

"Hope was really the key to my survival all those years. Faith in myself to simply pursue my duty to the best of my ability and ultimately return home with honor. Faith in my fellow man, starting with all of you here, knowing that you would be looking out for my family, and faith in my comrades in those various cells and cell blocks in prison, men upon whom I depended and who in turn depended upon me, sometimes desperately. Faith in my country, its institutions and our national purpose and cause. And of course, faith in God - truly, as all of you know, the foundation for it all."

HOPE. It was not only the key to Gerald Coffee's surviving a 7 year P.O.W. ordeal, but it is the key to any person surviving trials and tribulations in life. Without hope, life becomes unbearable. But with hope, even the most difficult circumstances can be persevered.

One of the blessings of having been justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is our being given a new hope - the hope of the glory of God - a hope in which we can rejoice.

We have begun a series looking at 7 blessings that we receive as a result of being justified in God's sight. As we have already seen from Romans 3, Justification is the act of God whereby he declares a sinner to be not guilty on the basis of the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ. As a person confesses his or her sinful condition before God and accepts the atoning work of Jesus Christ by faith, that individual becomes justified in the eyes of God, freed from the penalty and guilt of sin. And in addition to the verdict of not guilty, the justified believer also has the very righteousness of Jesus Christ himself given to him. So God the Father sees the justified believer as being just as pure and holy and righteous as the spotless Lamb of God, Jesus Christ himself.

Now we would think that such a precious gift of justification would bring with it some wonderful blessings. And such is certainly the case. In Romans 5:1-11, the Apostle Paul writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God gives 7 additional blessings that every believer has as a result of having been justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are no second class Christians in this regard - every believer is given the same blessings of justification by God.

We have already looked at two of these blessings - the blessing of having peace with God and having access to God. We now come to a third blessing - the blessing of being able to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

READ ROMANS 5:1,2

*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. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

Now as we begin to discuss this wonderful blessing, we must first realize what Biblical hope is all about. Even though we all use a language everyday and use it pretty loosely in common day usage, every living language is both distinct in certain meanings and fluid in that those meanings change over time. And we recognize this fact almost subconsciously in our usage of every day language.

\*When you are talking with your girlfriend or wife, you can call her a chick, but you had better not call her a hen. You can refer to her as your kitten, but you had better not call her catty. As close as a chicken is to a hen and a kitten is to a cat, the words make a difference, don't they?

Now our term "hope" is one of those words that has changed with usage from the meaning that it had years ago. And we must note that because the Greek term maintains that former precision of meaning. Today, hope is used synonymously with desire or wish. A child hopes that he will get a bicycle for Christmas. A student hopes that he will get an "A" on the exam. An executive hopes that he will get a promotion at work. In every case, the person is expressing a desire, a wish for something that he isn't at all sure will really come to pass. The Greek term translated *hope* indicates an expectation for that which is sure to come to pass. There is no question about the certainty of the event. But there is rather the fervent expectation awaiting for the event to come. It is like a child hoping for Christmas day to come. Or the student hoping for graduation day. Or the executive hoping for the annual vacation that comes every year. There isn't the question of whether or not the event will come. There is just the excitement of anticipating it.

Now when Paul writes of the believer rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, he is not implying that Christians wish or desire for the glory of God to come as kind of a dream for the future. Rather, he is indicating a firm expectation, an assurance, a joyful awaiting of that day in the future that is as sure as the existence of God and the promises that God has made to us.

So we can see how this blessing naturally follows the other 2. We saw two weeks ago that because we have been declared not guilty by God and have been given the very righteousness of Christ himself, we can have peace with God. War has ceased, we have laid down our arms, we have surrendered unconditionally to God, and God has accepted the atoning work of his son, Jesus Christ, as full payment for our sins. Now, last week, we saw that having peace with God, we now can have free access to God. We can come boldly before the throne of Grace anytime, night or day, to find grace and mercy to help us in our times of need. So we can enjoy freedom of access and fellowship with God throughout our lives here on this earth. Now, the next logical step having enjoyed fellowship and access to God here on the earth is to rejoice in the hope, the absolute assurance, that we will have even greater fellowship in the presence of God after we pass from this

earthly existence into our eternal state. So Paul says that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Now let's get into the specifics of what Paul is talking about here.

What is this hope of the glory of God in which we can rejoice? I would like to discuss with you 2 aspects of this hope of the glory of God that should bring great joy into each of our hearts as a blessing of our justification.

1. To rejoice in the hope of the glory of God means we rejoice in the fact that we will one day see the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory, face to face.

The Bible is very clear as to what happens to the believer when he or she passes from this earthly existence. When a Christian dies, that individual immediately enters the presence of the Lord.

\*Paul in writing to the believers in Corinth, said *to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord* (2 Cor. 5:8). Paul even admitted the personal struggle that he had with this truth to the believers at Philippi.

*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.* (Phil. 1:21-24) There was no question in Paul's mind that when he died, he immediately would go into the presence of the glory of the Lord. And Paul knew that this blessing was not just his alone, but every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who has been given the gift of justification by God could have this same expectation.

\*And it is also clear from the teachings of the Bible that there will be some Christians who will not have to face the suffering and agony of death. For one day, the Lord Jesus is coming back to take his followers home to heaven with him. And Christ at that time will begin to usher in the events of the last days which will lead to the destruction of this earth and the creation of the new heavens and new earth. READ 1 JOHN 3:1-3 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

READ 1 THESS. 4:16-18

*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

So, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ knows from God's word that his or her destiny is in the presence of the glory of God. This hope should bring great comfort and joy to the heart of every Christian. That's the reason for each of these passages that speak of the Lord's return ending with hope or encouragement. So Paul says in Romans 5 that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

We find a beautiful illustration of this at the end of Stephen's life as recorded in Acts 7.

As you know, Stephen has some distinctions in the Bible. He was among the first deacons elected from the body of the church in Acts 6. He was also the first Christian martyr that is found in the New Testament. He was the first person who is recorded to have given his life for his Christian faith. Perhaps it was because he was the first, the prototype of Christian martyrs, that God allowed some interesting details to be recorded concerning his death. Notice them as we read the response of the furious Sanhedrin as they heard the message that Stephen preached to them. READ ACTS 7:54-60

*When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw **the glory of God**, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Isn't this a wonderful passage of hope for every believer? Stephen is accused unjustly and subjected to a cruel and inhumane death. This would seem to be the worst possible scenario that any person could imagine in life. But God brings great blessing and comfort to Stephen in his most trying time. Can you imagine a more peaceful death than the one Stephen experienced here? Stephen's eyes were opened to see what awaits him - the glory of God himself. "He looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God" (7:55) So Stephen died with calmness and courage and compassion for he had the full assurance that he was leaving this life to a more glorious place. And isn't it interesting to note the impact that Stephen's death had on one young man named Saul - the man whose name would later be changed to Paul - the man who wrote this passage in Romans 5 that we are studying this morning.

Yes, the Christian is able to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God for every believer can know that to be absent from this body is to be immediately present in the sight of the Lord. Every Christian can have the full assurance that after this earthly existence the fullness of the glory of God awaits us, for we shall see the Lord Jesus Christ face to face, just as Stephen did. So we can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

2. But we must move to a second aspect of this truth as well. To rejoice in the hope of the glory of God also means that we rejoice in the fact that we also will be glorified one day. So we can rejoice in the hope

of the glory of God in a personal way, knowing that one day we will personally achieve the glory of God in our glorified state. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God as we look forward to that day when we will personally experience the glory of God in our own glorified state.

The Bible not only has a glorious message concerning what happens to our immaterial being (our soul and spirit) when we die being absent from the body and present with the Lord, but the Bible also teaches about what is destined to happen to the physical body of every believer as well. Whereas this earthly body will decompose back into dust one day, there is a glorious resurrection on God's schedule and every Christ is destined to receive a glorified, eternal, resurrected body. Our glorified body will be absolutely perfect in every way. It will be totally without sin or sinful nature. It will not be limited by the frailties and weaknesses of these earthly bodies. It will be a body just like Christ's resurrected body, except for the nail prints in the hands and feet and the wound in the side. Our glorification is a final blessing of our justification.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul a couple of chapters later in Romans 8:28-30 - *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 likeness of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* The progression that Paul gives is clear here, isn't it? The foreknowledge of God's omniscience to his predestination in his omnipotence to his efficacious calling in his mercy and grace to his justification in his righteousness to glorification in his holiness. And every single Christian has this glorious destiny in Christ. No wonder Paul says that we should rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Now the hope of the glory of God in our glorified bodies does not mean that we are without struggles and suffering here on this earth today. Paul spoke of this very candidly earlier in chapter 8 of Romans before he got to the glorious conclusion that we just read. *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (8:22-23)* That redemption of our bodies will occur when we are glorified.

But even having given the reality of human suffering and pain, Paul says that the hope of the glory of God in our glorified state is such a great truth that it makes the greatest of earth's sufferings pale beside it. *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (8:18)* What were Paul's present sufferings? He describes them in 2 Cor. 6:4-5 as *troubles, hardships and distresses, beatings, imprisonments and riots, hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger.* We would consider such

sufferings as these to be pretty significant, wouldn't we? But as great as they were, the Apostle Paul did not consider them worth comparing to our glorified state.

You can imagine the atmosphere in England on the day of Winston Churchill's funeral. This was the day when a nation was going to lay one of its great leaders to rest. Churchill had been the soul and spirit of England during W.W.2, refusing to let her quit even during the darkest days of the daily bombings. And now, he was dead - and a nation grieved. Churchill had planned his own funeral service to take place at the historic St. Paul's Cathedral. And most of it went as everyone expected - that is until it came to right at the end of the service. After the singing of one of the great hymns of the church and the benediction, a bugler placed high in the dome of St. Paul's intoned the sound of taps. But then before anyone began to stir to leave, the bugler began to play again. He began to play reveille - *It's time to get up, it's time to get up, it's time to get up in the morning*. People initially looked at one another in amazement. *This is not appropriate for a funeral*, they thought. But then, realizing that Winston Churchill had produced the entire service himself, the truth began to sink in. Churchill was testifying to his belief that death was not the end - but that there would be a morning of a new and everlasting life.

We don't know the beliefs that Winston Churchill had in his heart - only God knows a person's heart. But the way he chose to conclude his funeral service could not have been more appropriate. Especially for those who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, those who have been justified by faith in his redemptive work on the cross of Calvary - death becomes the gateway into the glory of God. So with Paul, every Christian can say, *And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*.