

96-04-26b

Okay, well, we're resuming now after our break and again, for the people that are listening to this tape, I apologize for the first side being short. There was a piece of stickum on the tape and the first quite a bit of the lesson got cut off there. But we're picking up here now with what we see in Chapter 5, talking about the privilege that we have, the opportunity that we have, to live a very strange and bizarre life from a human perspective because who would think that in terrible circumstances and in adversity and looking at a life that people would say, I wouldn't trade places with you for all the tea in China, that you could actually be enjoying it and be glad that you are where you are.

And this is the case with Paul. We just read those verses where he talks about his ministry and yet you would not have been able to drag the Apostle Paul away from his life and his opportunities as an apostle with a team of mules. He saw it for what it was, which was an incredibly great opportunity to be a part of the plan of God and to reflect the glory of God.

And, of course, of church-age believers, there will probably be none that have any greater impact than the Apostle Paul, even though he basically abandoned the search for a way to have impact and gave himself over completely to the plan of God and saw it for what it was. And in doing all of these things and all those hardships and afflictions that he listed, he had a great time. The Apostle Paul just had a rip-roaring good time, even when he was in prison.

I think he got a great amount of amusement when Rome imprisoned him and chained him to the guards down in the dungeon. Then he turned around and evangelized them all and had a captive audience. They couldn't get away, and he enjoyed that.

And he got great pleasure from seeing the way that God could turn adversity into blessing and into great production in God's plan. And so that's what he's talking about here. And it's possible for us, when we trust God, to have that same experience.

And when we do, it will produce perseverance, character, and hope in our lives. Then he says in verse 5, hope does not disappoint. And there is always a crisis point where we're going to be tempted after we've initially struck out on this course.

And we've said, you know, that really does make sense. I can see that that's the plan of God, and I want to do that. We start trying to do that.

Then there's a point at which we're going to be tempted to waver, like the Israelites did. Like Abraham, after he got the promise, he said, this is great, I'm going to have a son. And then all the doubts started creeping in.

Well, but what about this? What about that? And we tend to think, well, but what if I do this, and it doesn't pan out, and I'm going to be disappointed. And this is what Paul addresses here in verse

5. He says, that hope does not disappoint. There is no disappointment in putting the things of God first.

All of the verses that you can think of, when Jesus said, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. He's saying, you know, take no thought for your provision, your food, your clothing, your security. All of the things that worry you, all of the things that tense you up and cause dark clouds to pass in front of the sun in your life.

If you concentrate on those things, you're going to be depressed and you're going to be unhappy. And he says, seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And all of these things that you're worrying about will be added to you.

It's right at the point that you're willing to give them over and not worry about them, that they come, and not before. And he says, that hope does not disappoint. Why? Because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Love is the great command. Jesus said, by this shall all men know that you're my disciples. He doesn't say, by this shall all men know that you're saved.

By this they'll know that you're my disciples, that you're not only delivered from the lake of fire, but that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, someone who's taking advantage of this hope. And we don't have to produce that love. He says, love one another, walk in love.

The great commandment is to love our God and to love our neighbor as ourself. And so once again we think, well, I'm going to have to generate this. I'm going to have to exert a lot of effort.

And he says here that the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Well, how does this take place? It's one thing to say the love of God is poured out in our heart. We say, well, I'm looking around and the glass appears to be nearly empty.

I'm not really finding this love. What are the manifestations of love? What does it mean to love someone? We can see this in the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love.

And all of the other things in that list are subsumed under that heading. Peace, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, humility, self-control, all of those things are characteristics of someone that has the love of God in their soul. And so it would be wonderful to know if we could say abracadabra and that love would start springing forth and giving us all of those characteristics.

But once again, the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, what is the source of that love? We know it's God's love and so it's from the source of God. But the mechanism by which He gives us that love, what would you put that under in the attributes of God or the characteristics of God? What did we have up in chapter 5, verse 2? What is it that through faith we have access to? It's God's grace. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts is a gift of God's grace.

So if we want the gifts that come from God's grace, we need to lay claim on God's grace. How do we lay claim on God's grace? It's through faith. And that grace isn't just an abstract, well, I have the grace of God.

God's grace is concrete. Provision comes from God's grace. Strength, comfort, the sense of the presence of Jesus Christ in our life, those things come through God's grace.

And the love that we need to persevere under pressure, to persevere with people when people are unlovely, comes from God's grace. It's a gift of God's grace. But it doesn't just happen at random intervals.

It comes when we lay claim on God's grace through faith. And so as we do these things that are talked about here in the first couple of verses, that's where this comes from. And we think, how can I have the love that I know I should have and I just don't have? How can I have the patience that I know I should have? How can I have the peace that I know I should have and I just don't have? And sometimes we do find when the boat is just rocking gently in the breeze and then suddenly the great tsunami wave hits and we're bowled over and drenched in the water and some great calamity strikes and we lose it under pressure.

We do fine when the pressure is off, but we lose it under pressure. And we have to stop and say, okay, I know that God has allowed this in my life because this is a faith drill. This is a time to pass the Abraham test.

And stop and break it down into chunks and say, okay, first of all, my eternal salvation is not in doubt. Whatever happens in this situation, I will be alive in the eternal future with God forever. What is my hope? What is my opportunity here? And start thinking our way through the difficulty.

People can put this pressure on us. Circumstances can put this pressure on us. And we have to stop and think.

This is what boot camp is designed to teach people. This is what Plebeier at the Naval Academy or at West Point or any other training program that pressurizes training, that's the reason they do that. They put pressure on you to teach you to think under pressure.

That's a great skill, and it's one that we have to have spiritually. As soon as we're under pressure, we can stop and think, okay, I know why this pressure is here. I'm supposed to think under this pressure.

That's why God has allowed it. It's an opportunity to think. It's an obligation to think.

And when we think about the realities of God's plan and we make it so in our soul, that's faith. And as soon as we start exercising that faith and say, okay, I'm not going to die, however bad this is. I'm alive.

God still has a plan for my life. God knew this was coming. God has made provision.

I can't see it, but He sees it. He knows it's there. I'm going to trust Him for it.

And we start working our way through the little pieces of this problem, and we start exercising that faith, we're accessing the grace of God by which we stand, by which we prevail. And with each increment of faith comes peace, comes joy, comes perseverance, comes character, comes hope, the expectation that there is a light on the other side of this, that God is going to work all things together for good. And so that's the drill.

And that's why we're still here in a fallen world and why God doesn't simply create a bunch of people, stand them in a crowd, say, here's Jesus Christ. He died for your sins. Who wants Him? Everybody raise your hand.

You who didn't raise your hand, you're going to the lake of fire. You who raised your hand, you're coming to heaven, and human history is over. God didn't orchestrate it that way.

We've got thousands of years of lifetimes of humans after we come to Christ, and why is that? There's a reason for it. God could have just had a big meeting in heaven. Bing! All the people are created.

And an hour later, they're all faced with the opportunity for salvation. And an hour after that, everything is resolved. The reason we have life is to face and meet and pass this challenge.

And so that's what he talks about. He says, this hope does not disappoint. If you make this your priority, if you make this your goal, you will not be disappointed.

And that is a guarantee from the character of God. God has promised it, and it is just as certain as the movement of the planets, the laws of the universe, and so forth. The love of God has poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

We already have the Holy Spirit, don't we, regardless? Good times, bad times, sin, failure, success, whatever, the Holy Spirit is there. But when he is able to minister to us and give us that love is when we are operating in faith. So this is, as I said in the introduction tonight, this is a crux here.

Paul is summarizing everything that he's argued up to this point in the book. This is why he said what he said in Chapter 1 about the unbelievers. This is why he said what he said in Chapter 2 about thinking ahead to the judgment seat of Christ.

And if we sit around finding fault with everyone else and how they have done badly or they've done badly to us or whatever, come time at the judgment seat we're going to be held to account because we've missed this boat. And in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 he has led up to this. And in this little section of five verses, this is the issue.

This is the message that Paul wants to get across, that God the Holy Spirit is going to use in our soul tonight and tomorrow and the next day. The circumstances of life are just an excuse for faith. That's the only reason they're here.

It's the only reason we have experiences in life. They are excuses to think about God and to exercise faith. There is no point in achieving things in this life apart from God and apart from faith.

It's meaningless. We can amass a fortune, it'll be gone. We can achieve fame.

After we're dead, who cares? We can influence people, but we can influence them just as much for negative as for positive. And any of the other accomplishments in life are meaningless compared to the opportunity to make an eternal mark in God's plan. That's what he's summarizing here.

And it's all done without effort, without deeds, without accomplishments, without trying to adhere to a standard of works. All it is is knowing what God says, believing it in our hearts, and acting accordingly. And we're going to have some trailing arguments in the rest of Chapter 5 here that go back and talk about, once again, hammering this home by saying, this is what happened at salvation, and this is what happens in the Christian life.

But this is the main point, and we're going to move pretty quickly next time through the rest of Chapter 5 and get on into Chapter 6, because in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, the practical application, Paul's going to say, okay, I've expressed the principle to you, and you understand what the issue is in life. Here are some of the actual thoughts that can go through your mind when you're facing these pressures. You say, okay, I want to live the life of faith.

What am I supposed to be thinking under pressure? How can I get out from under this? Here it is. And in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, we're going to have some of the most practical truth in the entire Bible presented to us and offered to us as something to think when we're under pressure. So we'll be looking forward to that as soon as we finish Chapter 5, which we will do next time.

But right now, we'll stop here and close in prayer. Father, we thank You for the truth that's contained in Your Word. We thank You that You have seen fit to create us and to give us this great opportunity.

We know that our life can have meaning and purpose and definition. We know that we can be used by You to reflect Your own glory, both now and in the eternal future. We pray that these things will be retained in our souls, that God the Holy Spirit will use them as a sharp sword to reveal the thoughts and intents of our heart, to convict us, to correct us, instruct us, and to equip us for every good work.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

