

How Can We Keep Going?

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we're going to return to Romans chapter 5 where we were unread from Scripture. It's a standalone sermon today and we'll be, I think, for a number of weeks in the morning as we go into the summer.

Now you may look at a section like this and I don't know what you think when you read a section like this. Maybe you pick out words or maybe you think about certain things in the passage that are definitely some key words in this passage, rejoicing, hope.

There are some, the kind of ordinary words, rejoicing, hope, perseverance, peace. There's also some Bible kind of words in it, reconciliation, not entirely a Bible word, and words like that that come through this passage.

And what Paul is doing here under the guidance of God's Spirit is that he is setting out fundamental truths in the letter to the Romans, fundamental truths of the gospel to a young church, the young church in Rome that he'd never visited by this point.

But he did know a lot of the people through his various journeys. He knew a lot of the battles and the struggles that these young Christians had, not necessarily young in age, but they hadn't been Christians long.

[1 : 22] And he also knew about the transformed lives that they enjoyed through meeting and coming to know and trusting in Jesus. And he could therefore speak into their situation, even though he'd never been there, because it was the same as every church.

It was the same as every New Testament church. And also it's the same as every church today. It's no different. The basic characteristics of Christian life aren't any different than as they are now.

The situations are different, cultures different, scenarios are different, but the human need, the human hearts, the human struggles are all the same as is the divine answer to us.

So he shared with them in all the gospels, he shared God's truth and applied it to their lives. That's what Romans is like. And we need to recognize the same principles that work in our lives spiritually. We want to be rooted in the truths that enable us to keep going. And so that's the title of my sermon this morning, which is, how can we keep going? How is it that we keep going as Christians?

[2 : 33] I'll speak a little bit more into that in a moment. But it's primarily, you know, we're faced, you know, the Davies is up today and the Watson's will be leaving soon, both working and preaching here.

And we've also had, there's many other people leaving. How can we cope with so much change? I'm sorry if you're listening today and you're not part of the congregation, you're visiting or you're online and you're from Campbelltown, you may think, oh, this is a very focused sermon for St. Clummas.

But as I've just said, Paul spoke to the Roman church with the truth of the gospel. And so I'm hoping that while it applies to us, it will also apply to everyone who is here today by God's grace and God's spirit.

How can we keep going? That's a really significant question. It's been a very hard 18 months for us, hasn't it, in so many ways. And life has changed at a general level because of the pandemic.

And I think it's changed forever. And you're probably sick and tired of hearing about it. Every sermon you hear always ends up talking about the pandemic. I don't really want to do that. But we can't escape from it either, can we?

[3 : 40] It's such a big part of life just now. And it's there. Personally, maybe something that's been a big challenge and a big difficulty for you.

For many of us, it's been manageable. But it has still taken an unmeasurable toll on our lives. It's changed everything. I know I'm changed because of it.

There's no doubt about that. I think I'm still working out what that looks like. I'm reflecting on that. Maybe it's my and maybe it's our priorities that have changed. Maybe it's our relationship with time that has changed. Maybe it's the thought of commitments and moving into commitments again that we're concerned or anxious about. We've found a comfort zone that we really don't want to move from. Maybe we've lost our confidence. Maybe it's shattered. So there's lots of ways in which we've been changed personally in these last 18 months.

[4 : 37] I have no doubt about that. And things have changed for us in our gospel community here in St. Columbus over that time. It's been a really tough time. Tough time in minister and a tough time to be minister too in the congregation.

And now our full-time ministry team is about to come to an end. And it's been a fruitful and a blessed partnership. We've had three years with Thomas and the family and that's passed in an instance.

It's been too short. It seems like yesterday. And that's very hard. It's very difficult to deal with. And that alongside losing, I think it's probably now up to about 40 people this summer.

Some have already gone and some will be going. That's a huge, that's at least a quarter of the congregation. That's a big family to be losing at one time. It's a huge challenge.

And maybe those of us who are still here, who are left, I say, how can we keep going? How can we keep going again? I know I've asked that question.

[5 : 40] You know, as we build relationships, as we love people, as we lean on them, as we rely on them, as we learn from them, it is difficult and so we feel left behind.

I don't mean that dispensationally for those of you with an ecclesiastical bent in your humour, but I mean that there's that sense sometimes, you know how it is, isn't it?

It can feel a bit, well, dull to be left behind. I always remember, it's not quite the same, but you should remember coming home from summer, free church camps, 10 days of absolute mayhem and enjoyment and sleeplessness and fun and football and everything else that made life just brilliant, people of your own age and everything.

And then you came home and it was just your mum and dad in the house. And it was so boring and so dull to be back into ordinary life again.

It seemed like you wanted to live in camp existence forever, poor leaders, it must have been a nightmare for them. I know that. And it's slightly different, but nonetheless it feels like that a little bit, you know, you're left behind and it's not just the fact that the Thomas' are, the Davis is even, sorry, Thomas, the Davis' are leaving and everyone else, but we've lost people who've been taken home this summer and this year from the congregation, people that we love down close to us, Elizabeth and Ivan, and we recognise that loss and there's a great challenge for us.

[7 : 18] A great challenge of building a new community, serving, weakening and weak out, opening our homes and our hearts again, getting used to new voices in the pulpit, taking part in all the organisational steps that lead out of the pandemic.

And along with all that, we see what's happening in society. A lot of, maybe we struggle with the opposition and the increasing opposition and hostility to the Christian faith, that credibility gap that seems to be there between where people are at and where we would love them to be if they would come to know Jesus.

Maybe we sense unanswered prayers, lack of evidence of God at work and we're weary of all that. So how do we keep going? Well, it all adds up to suffering, doesn't it?

And suffering is a reality. It talks about suffering in verse 3 and we're going to come back to that. But it's difficult. And even for those who are leaving, it's difficult because there's excitement and there's hope and there's something new.

But there's also, I'm sure, a lot of trepidation and moving up into the unknown. So that Paul's remedy is the same then, same now as it was then.

[8 : 27] What does he, so what am I focusing on? What he says in verse 2, he says, through him, through Christ, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

So I've not got anything new to say this morning, but we stand in grace. That's what we're going to do and that's what we're going to keep doing. It's kind of the same thought as you get from Ephesians 3 verse 17, which is going to come up.

And it's one we know well and it's one that's connected to our discipleship model. I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all of the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

And you remember that picture that we had for our discipleship team? Rooted and living in Christ from Jeremiah 17. And that's really the same thing he's saying, stand in grace, stand in that place. Now, I may be rooted in the power of love. Now, some of you are pretty young here, weren't alive in 1984, but there's a very famous song in 1984 called The Power of Love by Jennifer Rush.

[9 : 40] And it was number one, I think, probably for longer than any other song in a million years. But I was looking up and it was also sung by Celine Dion. And in the YouTube version of Celine Dion's singing of that song, Power of Love, there are five billion views, five billion views of that.

And that's not, I mean, it's an awful song. It's not just the song. It's what it's, you know, it's the message that attracts people, because people know that love is a priceless commodity, that it's hugely powerful.

Even in ordinary human terms, if there isn't that love, we know that evil flourishes. Obviously opposite of love in their societies is neglect and abuse and greed and the absence of humanity and all of this good.

But we need to remind that it's not just working up within ourselves a sense of love that's just merely human. It's that great and unique gift from God in our lives.

Look at that in verse five. It says, Our hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[11 : 02] That's the power of love that we have. It's God's power that's in our lives and in our hearts that we will stand in. We stand in that grace.

And verses six to 11 in the passage that we read goes on to explain that in terms of Jesus and the gospel and the cross and His death and His resurrection and the life He brings.

That is what we have. We are reconciled to God. We are brought into His company. We are made right with God through Jesus Christ and it is because He loves us and He has given Himself for us. That's the glory of God. You wonder what the glory of God is? That's the glory. A Christ nailed to the cross. That's the glory of God. That is where God's glory is most clearly seen.

It's not in the holy place. It's not in the tabernacle. It's not anywhere else but on the cross. That's where God the Father works out our salvation through God the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 08] And that being rooted and established in love, standing in grace, what does it give us? So what does it give us at a time of change and a time of difficulty?

Well it gives us unexpected peace, doesn't it? Verse one and two. And therefore, since we have a justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace with God through faith in Him. And it's not a blind faith. It's faith in the living person of Jesus and His work and in what is revealed in His work.

And that goes deep into our soul. It trusts Him even with the deepest questions that we find are not answered.

So we ask for more faith because when we have more faith, which is a gift, we will know more peace in our hearts. And can I say that that peace is, if you know it, you'll know it because it's counterintuitive.

[13 : 06] It's not just ordinary peace. In other words, I often worry that as Christians we become complacent. You know, I've got God's peace in my heart. Everything's okay. It's not like that.

It's not a complacency, but it's knowing that you can't change the world. And by grace and with faith, it's knowing you can change your world.

That's this peace. It says, you know, we would love to change the world, wouldn't we? We're frustrated by all the things we can't change, all the circumstances that are beyond our control.

It says, my peace I give you is saying that I'm sovereign, but I give you the power to change your world, the power of the Spirit.

Means we can wrestle with God about the things that confuse and frustrate and anger us in this miserable existence that sometimes it is for us.

[14 : 05] And we trust that even though it doesn't look like it, God knows what He's doing. That's what the peace is. And it also gives us perspective in our suffering.

So we come back to that word because I kind of introduced the sermon today in that context. We might not have thought of it directly as suffering change, but nonetheless, he goes on to say in chapter 5, in verse 3, not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

So it gives us this standing rooted in grace. Standing in grace gives us a perspective on suffering that reminds us it's not random.

It's certainly not easy, but that in it God has a purpose both globally, locally and personally. And as a church, God has a purpose for all the change that's happening, for those that we are losing, and for all the cost that we feel about that.

And remember, He's not only working in our lives as we lose so many, He's working in the lives of all those who are leaving. You know, He's carrying on working in them. And we want just to rejoice in that and be part of that.

[15 : 25] And we recognize that Christ wants access to our hearts in all our suffering and in all our battle.

And when we give Him access and when we take our suffering and the questions, how can we go on to Him, He turns that and changes that.

And He enables us, what does He say? He enables us to have perseverance. So that's what I'm saying today, through God, that how can we go on in the suffering and the struggles?

Well, as we take it to God, He will help us persevere and we'll go again. St. Columbus will go again. That's what we'll do. We'll start again and we'll grow and we'll build and we'll lose people again and we'll go again and we'll plant churches again and we'll persevere until He takes us home because that's what we do.

Suffering's okay, suffering's okay, loss is okay. Go back to Him daily because it's not about fortitude. It's not just about a sort of stoic attitude.

[16 : 35] It's going back to Him for the strength in order to persevere. I know, at 31 years of ministry, I would have crashed and burned every single day without going to the source.

And I did crash and burn when I didn't and when we don't. We know that, don't we? He alone enables us to persevere. He gives us strength. That's what He says.

That strength, it's supernatural. And He gives us character and that's tremendous, isn't it? These three things, He sucks, but perseverance, strength and character.

And we know that even people who are not Christians, people who don't believe in God or who don't believe in anything beyond themselves, people know, isn't it, that we'd never really grow in our character without suffering, without battles, without opposition.

You know, that's the principle of life, you know? Ask any athlete. Ask anyone who's achieved in life where they've got to. They will talk about sufferings that built character from a human point of view.

[17 : 39] And then the Bible will say, you learn more in the house of mourning than you do in the house of feasting. So God uses that. He uses it as we learn about ourselves. He teaches it about ourselves and about Himself.

So the difference between merely surviving in a human point of view and persevering and building character from a Christian point of view is that it's not just about self-reliance, not about, you know, finding the inner strength.

It's not just about that, which can be remarkable, the human ability to strongly keep going can be remarkable. It's not, but it's not just that. It's not just gritting your teeth.

It's not just stoic or medicinal or survivalist until heaven. It's different from that. It's a perseverance, a strength and a character, and with this I finish.

It includes rejoicing and hope. That's what makes it different from just gritting our teeth and keeping on going. That's what makes it miraculous. And that's what enables us today to say, how can we keep going?

[18 : 45] Not only because He gives us strength and will change our character, but He will enable us in it to rejoice in hope. So this small section has rejoicing three times.

Through Him we have access, having also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings. And then on to verse 11, more than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation. That is unique to the Christian life.

Not just rejoicing in general, but rejoicing in suffering because we know why. Why? Well, we might not know why, but we know who in all.

It's grounded in this recognition of what Christ has already done for us and that we have been raised to life in Him, never to die. That gives us a perspective that only the Christian can enjoy and see by faith.

[19 : 49] It's not that our rejoicing, therefore, is circumstantial. We don't have all the answers. We don't know. But our suffering is not in vain and it's not empty.

And we have a relational hope, don't we, in Christ? You know, if you start a new job and you've got new colleagues, for example, as Thomas will have shortly, maybe not so many colleagues in terms of a team, but you'll start a new job or maybe just being young and all the friends that you have or moving to a new neighborhood with new neighbors or getting married or birth and having a new baby.

You know, there's anticipatory joy and hope in that, isn't there, in new relationships. Looking forward to what that means, it gives us great hope and great anticipation, relational.

And that's very much what we have in Christ, but it's more than that. Because it's also, it's not just anticipatory hope, but it's realized hope.

That's why we can celebrate when the vaccine started getting rolled out. It was a lot of celebration, wasn't it? Because it was realized hope. There's an end to this.

[21 : 02] Or remember going back about the junior football team that were trapped in a cave in Thailand when they hoped that they would escape from that terrible position. And then when they did amazing celebration, or the miners in Chile, or the end of a war, when that happens, the anticipation changes to celebration because it's hope realized.

But we have both of these things as Christians. Our hope is realized already, but they're still anticipated. They're still more to come. We hope and we rejoice.

It's tremendous, isn't it? Because we have in Christ that strength and that spirit of God and that perspective. And we have that peace and that perseverance and that strength.

But we also have great hope moving forward, anticipating. And that's wonderful. So how we keep going? Well, we're going to keep going because we're going to pick it up and we're going to start again because we're going to stand in His grace.

That's what we're going to do. We're going to be rooted and established. And we have the verse from Jeremiah, which is the verse that went along, didn't it? With the tree picture.

[22 : 18] Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, who is confident in Him. He will be like the tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. Does not fear when heat comes, it leaves, or always green. It has no worries in times of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

That's what Paul is speaking about here. We will stand in grace. We will know His peace. And we will rejoice and hope that's what we'll do.

But we'll need to be facing Jesus. We'll need to be rooted in Him. And that's the only way we'll keep going. Because otherwise, we would just pack it in, wouldn't we? So we keep going because of who Jesus is and because of His promises.

And that is wonderful and great today. And those who have left or who are leaving, who are moving away, who are going to different places, the Davises and the Watsons and lots of other people within the congregation, they have that reality as well.

And so that binds us together. And we pray and hope that many, many more people will come to know that hope in Edinburgh. So we'll plant lots of churches because there's such a great need and because the gospel is flourishing.

[23 : 30] He will close that credibility gap. Let's pray. Father, God, help us to understand and know who you are. Help us to be confident in you and help us to have hope and encouragement.

And we pray that you would bless us. And as we close today by welcoming new members, we rejoice in that, just that gentle reminder that the work goes on.

In Jesus' name, amen. So before we have to listen to our last song together, we are welcoming every so often we welcome new members into the congregation.

And isn't that a great kind of just token? It wasn't prearranged this way that we would do it this way. But it's a great way to remind ourselves the work goes on and that there'll be new members, new people committing to the life and work of the congregation moving forward.

So what we do is I'm just going to welcome them, tell you who they are, and then they're going to stand up. And I'll ask them some questions that just explain a little bit about membership, you know, what it involves and not not what involves, but why we do it.

[24 : 36] And then I'll ask a question of the congregation to which you reply as well, because it's something we do together. We've done it before and we like to recognize that in our lives.

So first, and we've got their photos up so that you know who they are without their masks on. Isn't that good? So we've got Terence and Emma who we welcome today. Terence grew up and became a Christian in Hong Kong, then he went on to study theology first in Taiwan, then in Princeton and now in New College across the road.

He's married to Emma, who grew up in Taiwan and became a Christian when she was 12. And like us all, they feel God has been maturing and working in their lives through many different ways and different experiences.

We're delighted that you're with us. Emma is carrying their first child and we will remember you in our prayers as that time for arrival gets closer.

And as you seek to, we will seek to be your family away from family, as we know your own families are very far away, especially at this exciting and expectant time.

[25 : 42] And then we have Kira Marshall, who is also joining us. Kira has been with us for over a year in the congregation. She originally hails from another kingdom, the kingdom of Fife in Glen Rathis and became a Christian through a summer holiday club at the church that she had started to attend.

She works as a nanny here in the city, realizes the importance of being committed to the church family and worshiping life through the ups and downs of the Christian walk. And lastly and very gloriously, photograph of Graham, who doesn't he look sharp there, Graham?

He's plastic in his moderatorial gear. It's not moderatorial, it's degree. Graham's been with us for quite a while and he's finally got round to transferring his membership from York Baptist Church, where he became a member.

I became a Christian in his late twenties. Graham grew in the faith there and then went on to study theology and then came up to ETS, which is what brought him to Edinburgh to do a Masters.

And through that God in that time has given him such a great desire to read and to study something that he never had before. And Graham knows and understands the reality of being rooted in prayer and in the word, he works as a contractor for HSBC and is a mad sports fan.

[27 : 02] So we're very glad to welcome you guys today. It's great to have you. We know that some of you have been here for a while, but it's just great to have that being brought into membership.

So I'm going to ask you just to stand, if you will, for a moment. And there's four questions that just speak about a little bit about membership, which is that you're a committed Christian.

You recognize the importance of worship coming together, being under the pastoral care of the spiritual leaders of the church and of serving in the church. So do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the only Savior of sinners in whom you have put your personal hope and trust as a sinner needing forgiveness, grace and spiritual life?

Do you resolve in prayerful alliance on the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to live as a disciple of Christ or continue living as disciples of Christ? Do you promise to support this church family and its worship, its work with your gifts and graces to the best of your ability as you're doing? And do you submit yourself to the pastoral care, teaching and discipline of the spiritual leaders of the church and seek its peace and prosperity as we promise to love and care for you?

[28 : 14] Because I hope that we've been doing. And now as a congregation, do you promise to pray for our friends, to welcome them warmly, to keep welcoming them, to love them as part of this church family and together help them grow in grace as we all seek to do?

Excellent. Let me pray for you guys. Lord God, we thank you for this day and we thank you for the lives of those that are standing coming into membership today.

We pray for Terrence and Emma. We pray your blessing on them as they have had to adapt to living in a new country, a new culture at a time of pandemic and a new church, a time of pandemic. It's so difficult and yet they've done so graciously and so encouragingly and so happily. We pray you bless their unborn child and that you would give them great excitement as they think of their expanding family and remember them being so far from their own parents and all the challenges that that brings.

Lord God, we pray for them. We pray that we would surround them with love and with grace and with any support we can. We pray too for Kira. We pray your blessing on her in her work and in her life and with her family and as she continues to be engaged in the work of the congregation here. [29 : 34] As we pray for Graham, we thank you for him. We pray you continue to bless and guide Graham and that you would continue to help them to be so important as part of the congregation.

We thank you for the variety of their lives, their gifts, their abilities and their characters. So we thank you that you've worked in their lives sometimes from a long time ago and that they are growing in grace and in love for you.

May that be true of us all as we battle and struggle and rejoice in the Christian life. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.