

The Freedom of Hope

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[0 : 00] Well, we finished our morning series on Ruth last week and until September 11th we're going to have some one-off sermons until we start our new series called The Mission of God.

If you've been with us on Sunday nights at all recently, one of the things that we've been focusing on is that there's a premise in the Bible.

One of the major premises is that there's a difference in supernatural change and natural change. Natural change, natural change, as the Old Testament put it, is guarding up your loins.

It's picking yourself up by your bootstraps. It's trying to become a better person, becoming, you know, Corey 3.0, getting up every day and trying to be your better self.

But the logic of the Scriptures is that there's an entirely different way to change. A supernatural change. And the change that we've been looking at on Sunday nights in John is the same thing that Paul is talking about in Romans chapter 5.

[0 : 58] It's a change that it can only come about by the Holy Spirit. And there's an underlying premise to that and it's something that we believe at St. Columbus that salvation is not just saying yes.

It's not just saying yes to the claims of the Gospel, but that the Gospel actually changes everything. It changes things all the way down. The Gospel reconciles people to God, it reconciles people to people, neighbor to neighbor.

It reconciles people to the material world, to the universe, to food. But one of the first places that the Gospel does is the work of reconciliation.

One of the first places that it changes people is inside of them. It changes who you are. It changes who you are.

Robert Louis Stevenson, the famous Scottish novelist, wrote *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a book that probably most of you have interacted with at some point. And it's no surprise that Stevenson was raised in a Scottish Presbyterian home if you read that book, because the entire book is expressing Stevenson's view that people are basically split into good and to evil.

[2 : 12] So Dr. Jekyll makes a serum, and the serum he thinks is going to make him into a better person. That's what he's trying to do. But what the serum actually does is it reveals his true self, or part of his true self.

It turns him into Mr. Hyde. And at one point in the book, when he's reflecting on what the serum does to him, it turns him into Hyde, this monster. He says, with every day and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I drew steadily nearer to the truth by whose partial discovery I'd been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck that man is not truly one, but truly two. The Bible puts it better than that. The Bible says that we are at war with ourselves, that sin creates a war between your mind and your heart, a duality.

A duality in your very presence. Sin is the power that comes in and rips you apart. It sets your mind against your heart and against your desires. You know this because have you ever known what was right in a particular situation?

What choice you needed to make? The ethical choice you needed to make, the moral decision. And you knew. You knew in your head exactly what it was, but you decided to go the other way.

[3 : 27] Right and why? You didn't care. In the moment, you just didn't care because your desires overwhelmed what you knew. Your head was at war with your heart. Your heart doesn't believe what your head tells you.

You see, your self is at war with yourself. It's not just in mere ethics, but this also happens to us in terms of happiness. It happens to us in terms of happiness.

You can have the greatest week of your life. All your circumstances are in place. You come to Fridays. You have a good Friday afternoon, Friday evening when you've had a great work week. And you know you've accomplished all the tasks you need to accomplish. And you've prayed your prayers and you've read your Bible and your wife's not mad and your husband's not mad and your kids are not crying at night. You're a student and you finally found that girl, that guy. And your romance is on cloud nine. But look, there's still a part of you that's just not satisfied. You know, you're just not, you're just not, you know everything's good, but you're not completely content.

[4 : 29] There's a something, there's a something going on in your head. You know St. Augustine, one of the early church fathers put it this way, our hearts are constantly restless.

Our hearts are constantly restless. There's a something. There's a something. What, the answer is in this passage that something, Paul's telling us is that we need supernatural change due to a supernatural presence.

So the question is, how do you know if you've experienced supernatural change? How do you know if the Holy Spirit, how do you know if the change you're experiencing is change wrought by the Holy Spirit?

How do you know? And that's what Paul's addressing in this passage. Paul is telling you here that you can know the answer to that question by asking another question. And the question is, what do you hope in?

What do you hope in? What do you hope is the subjective disposition of the heart? It's a state of being.

[5 : 41] It's a standing in something that reflects true change. And so there's two things that we need to figure out about this hope. First the definition of hope. What's the definition of hope?

And then secondly the freedom of hope. How is hope free? So first the definition of hope. If you look down at verse 1, hope has a context.

And the context of hope for Paul is the word therefore. You see the very first word, therefore. And the therefore is there because it's pointing to the logic of the first four chapters of the book of Romans.

He's been making an argument and the word therefore is pointing to his entire argument that he's made from chapters 1 to 4. And the culmination of that argument is in that one little phrase right after the therefore.

Since we have been justified by faith. Since we have been justified by faith. Justification by faith. That's what Paul's talking about up to this point in the book of Romans.

[6 : 37] To get justification by faith, to get what he's talking about, you have to lift yourself up to the judgment seat of God. You have to leave your body. You have to leave your mind has to go up and think about the judgment seat of God for a moment.

There's a temptation for us to think about Christian salvation in the way that other religions think about Christian salvation. You compare yourself to others.

You get your standard of good from looking around you. You get your standard of good from how well you obey the religious practices. Right, so in Buddhism for example, you subscribe to a particular program and then at the end of your life you hope beyond hope that that program has been enough to get you into the next life to get you a better life in the future.

But the Christian, what Paul's talking about here is completely different from that. Totally different from that. What he's saying is that you have to raise yourself up to the judgment seat of God.

You have to stand face to face before the judgment seat of God. When that happens, what happens is that all conceit, all pride, all capability completely melts away like wax.

[7 : 50] It falls apart. We read it in our first scripture reading, Romans 3, no one is righteous. That's Paul's way of saying it from Isaiah 52. No one is righteous. No not one.

You fall apart completely like wax before the face of God. What's justification? Justification is these two beautiful words, even so. Even so.

You fall completely, but even so. It's God's pronouncement. It's God's pronouncement that all the death you deserved, Jesus got.

And all the life that you're getting, Jesus bought for you. That's God's pronouncement. What Paul is doing here, what Paul is doing here is he's setting for us, up for us an understanding of salvation.

And that's that salvation, we can think of it like this. It's divided between an objective and a subjective reality. An objective and a subjective reality.

[8 : 52] The objective reality is all the things that God does, completely outside of you. It's completely free grace. It has nothing to do with what you do.

It's completely outside of you. And the way he's manifesting that is not just justification, but you see what justification gets you. Since you've been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

We have peace with God. You might be tempted to think that what Paul is talking about there is a subjective category. A category of your inner disposition, a category of resting, of serenity, of calmness, of peace.

But actually the word that he's using there is referring to an objective reality. It's the word of welcome.

That's another way you could translate it. It's the word of welcome or favor. It's like if you betrayed a friend and on the night of his son's wedding, he's invited you to come sit at the table of the wedding feast.

[9 : 56] It's the word of welcome. In other words, it's objective. It's that you were at one time an enemy of God and now God has made peace with you. It's the word of welcome.

It's the word of favor. Now this is the objective reality of salvation, justification and peace. You were at war with God and you are no longer.

Paul's reviewing the objective work of salvation to tell us about the subjective. In other words, he's talking about everything that God has done objectively in order to talk about who you are to become, what salvation does to you, what salvation does to change you.

The work of justification worked on to you by the Holy Spirit does to you. He talked about faith, but now the primary subjective benefit of salvation of justification is this.

It's at the very center of our passage. It's that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[11 : 01] That's who we become. We are people who rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Is the Holy Spirit working out change in your heart?

What do you hope in? And Paul's answer is for people who have the Holy Spirit working out change in their heart, their hope is in the glory of God.

That's the center subjective attribute of the Christian who's known something of the new birth. Now, what in the world does this mean? That's the question.

What does this mean? What is he talking about when he says rejoice in the hope of the glory of God? What does this mean? So, let's start with the word rejoice.

The word rejoice, when you read it in that context, it sounds a bit like a party, like a celebration. Celebrate party, be glad, be super pumped, be happy in the hope of the glory of God.

[12 : 01] That's completely true. We should do that, but one of the ways that the word rejoice oftentimes is translated in the metaphors and the Psalms is the word frolic.

So it's like a deer frolics back and forth on its legs dancing. If you've seen a deer do that, maybe you haven't seen a deer do that. Go to the zoo, maybe they'll do it.

This is the idea of celebration. The Psalms even says that God frolics over Zion. He jumps like a deer. He celebrates like a deer. Excitement, right?

Now, that's all true, but this is not the same word. This is not the word that Paul's using here for rejoice. The word Paul's using here for rejoice is probably best translated a little bit differently.

If you use it in a noun form, it's like a branding iron in a noun. Yeah, it's so strange. It's like when you, you know, a branding iron on an animal or something like that.

[13 : 01] In other words, the connotation is a firmness. It's a permanence. It's a surety. Rejoice, he's saying here is be firm.

Stand firm. It's like standing on top of a bullwork, a foundation stone. It's the opposite of standing on shifting sand. The term he's using here is a soldier's verb.

It's the soldier's verb for standing up and having your armor put on you. Well, it's the point he's saying is it's immovable. It's immovable. So what he's saying here is be confident in the immovable hope of the glory of God.

That's what he's saying. Now, all right. Now that leaves us to settle the next. What exactly is this hope? What does it mean to hope in the glory of God? What's he saying here?

And I think what he's saying here is that hope in the glory of God is a hope that is both already and not yet. It's a hope that's both already and not yet.

[14:07] Now, everybody's got hopes. There's a particular way of using the word hope in modern discourse and late modern discourse. And you guys know the way of using hope, the word hope.

I've got an alumni letter not too long ago from the University of Edinburgh because I've done one degree there and I'm in a second. The letter read, what are our hopes and dreams for our graduates?

And you immediately know what they mean by the word hope there. It's your goals, your dreams. In other words, the way we use the term hope in late modern discourse is that our hopes give us our context of meaning in life.

It's the things that you see out in front of you in the future that you want so bad to define exactly who you are that give you the purpose of getting out of bed in the morning.

What are our hopes and dreams for our graduates? What are our hopes and our dreams for our people and our company? What are our hopes and dreams for X, Y, or Z? That's what we mean by hopes and dreams in late modern discourse and our normal discourse.

[15:10] One of the most famous cultural expressions of the way we use that word hopes attached to dreams actually comes from Bruce Springsteen of all places.

In 1999, Bruce Springsteen did a tour called The Land of Hopes and Dreams and he unveiled a song during that tour called The Land of Hopes and Dreams and scholars, I suppose there are Springsteen scholars because I read one, says this, in Springsteen's take, all are welcome on the train of the land of hopes and dreams.

Not just the righteous and the holy, but saints and sinners, losers and winners, whores and gamblers, you just get on board the train. The train will not disappoint you.

The train of the American Western hope and dream. And entertainment tonight commenting on the song and the tour called this Springsteen's pure secular gospel and further commented that churches would be lucky to have just a fraction of the people in their pews that got as excited about the church's gospel as they did about Springsteen's pure, as the people at the concert did about Springsteen's pure secular gospel.

It's a gospel, ET describes it, of secular hopes and dreams where no dream will be left behind. No hope will be unrealized if you just get on the train, if you get on the train of the American Western dream.

[16:46] Now look, everybody immediately knows as soon as you hear that, that's complete ludicrous. If you've lived for a month, for six months, for a year in life, even a baby can know that this is complete ludicrous.

You see hope, hope in popular discourse, in late modern discourse is entirely circumstantial. It's entirely circumstantial.

Hope is a dream, a desire for favorable outcomes in the midst of totally uncertain circumstances. And it's the way that we define the entire meaning of our lives as 21st century people.

The gospel of hopes and dreams, the secular gospel of hopes and dreams says, find your ultimate identity, find your context of meaning, find your value, find your true source of joy in a life of circumstantial hope.

But let's say hypothetically, even when a person meets all those hopes and dreams, you know, a little Barack Obama hoping someday that he could become president.

[17:52] You pick your figure and they realize all their hopes and dreams and it comes to truth in a parallel universe where that might be possible.

Every single train of hope and dream falls off the tracks at the point of death, at the point into believing it. Even if you're able to avoid destruction, disease, disaster, domination in your whole life, all the terrible deeds, at the end of your life, you're still going to fall off the track, straight into the pit of oblivion, the pit of death.

That's all the secular gospel of hopes and dreams can offer. It's complete circumstantial hope. One of the great ways of illustrating this is from the 19th century poem, Ozimandius.

I don't know if any of you guys have heard that one. Ozimandius was written by an English romantic poet, Percy Shelley, who was actually married to Mary Shelley, the author of Frankenstein.

He wrote in 1818 and the poem imagines an Egyptian memorial, a researcher, an Egyptologist traveling through Egypt and coming across a never before seen memorial, a stone in Egypt.

[19 : 05] On the pedestal of the stone is written these words, my name is Ozimandius, king of kings, pharaoh of pharaohs. Look on my works, you mighty and despair.

And then the poem goes on, the city around the monument was gone. Nothing but level sands for miles.

The memorial itself had just two legs left and a broken and half statue with faded words. You see, even the biggest empire building hopes and dreams that were once realized in some past are nothing but level sands in all flesh like grass.

All flesh like grass. Paul's idea of hope is totally different from this. You can only believe in a secular gospel of hopes and dreams for so long until the disappointment of not reaching them crushes you.

Paul's gospel of hope is totally different from this. He calls it a hope that will not put you to shame, it will not disappoint you in other words.

[20 : 23] It's a transcendent hope. It's a hope that reaches beyond the bounds of temporary circumstance. It's not a hope in a future that is unsure.

That's the difference. And he calls it the hope of God's glory or the glory of God. Now what does he mean? What's the glory of God?

There's, I think, two ways of talking about the glory of God. The Old Testament word for the glory of God, glory, the word glory, is the word kaboad.

And kaboad is so hard to translate. We don't know how to translate it because, well, Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians.

He talks about the eternal weight of glory. The eternal weight of, from the Old Testament, kaboad. Kaboad has the sense of weightiness.

[21 : 18] Just being weighed down. And you see what Paul's saying. God's glory is the eternal weight of weightiness. You see? It's the only way to tell you about it is to show you.

Every time Jesus in the gospels would talk to somebody and they wouldn't understand who he was and they would ask him and he would use one little word in Greek, two little words in English.

He would say, I am. I am. And what would happen every single time in the gospels when he says the words I am? People, no matter if they believed in him or not, would fall on their face.

Even the guards in Gethsemane, when he said I am, they could do nothing else but fall flat on the ground. You see what they said? They felt kaboad. They felt the weight of weightiness fall upon them.

The glory that was standing in their very presence. The weight of glory. That's the first way. It's God's fame. His weightiness pronounced throughout all the earth.

[22 : 17] But that's true. That's true. That's true for what glory is, but that's not actually what Paul means here. Paul is actually pointing to something a little bit different, a little bit more precise by the phrase, the glory of God.

You know, in the Old Testament, God manifests himself in a cloud. He hid his glory. Nobody could look at him face to face. So he hid his glory in the cloud.

What's the glory of God in the New Testament? Hebrews 1, verse 3, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the ray, the radiance of the glory of God made known in these last days.

Verse Thessalonians, when Jesus Christ comes again, he's coming in the cloud. You see, what Paul is talking about here is not just the weight of weightiness of a generalized glory.

He's talking about a person. Hope in the glory of God is hope in Jesus Christ. The glory of God made known, the radiance, the glory of God on display.

[23 : 28] There's nothing more certain in this life that you're going to suffer. There's nothing more certain. There's nothing more certain in this life that your circumstances will not always be the fulfillment of your hopes and dreams.

What Paul is telling you that there's nothing more certain in life than that Jesus Christ is coming again. That's the hope of the glory of God, the hope that Jesus is going to make good on his promises.

There's only one sure hope, one sure place, one disposition of your heart, one desire that will not fail you, that won't dump you, that won't fire you, that won't divorce you, that won't abandon you, that won't leave you as an orphan, that won't tell you your mediocre, that won't tell you that being single is being worthless, that won't tell you that being unemployed is a road to nothing but despair.

There's nothing more certain that you're going to suffer and there's nothing more certain, Paul is saying, than that Jesus Christ is coming to bring death to death. It is a circumstance. It's one circumstance, one event, one happening.

If your hope is in anything else, then all you have is a I hope so, not I hope in. That's a big difference. All right, second and finally, five minutes and we'll be done.

[25 : 02] This is short, five minutes. The freedom of hope. Hope is so freeing. Hope in the glory of God, hope in Jesus Christ is so freeing from the slavery of circumstantial happiness.

If you look with me at the text, you'll see the logic in verse two at the end. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in suffering.

Knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope. Now, you see that chain of logic are bookended by hope. You have hope and then you suffer and then it forms into endurance and then out of suffering you get more hope.

It's a logic that goes from hope to hope. When you have hope in something so transcendent over the waves, the coming and going of the miserableness of daily circumstance, of the potential despair of daily circumstance, then what happens is that when you step into the fire, you can be refined like gold.

You actually want God more when you step into suffering. It produces more hope versus the circumstances where the fire comes and it lights you and it just burns you up into despair.

[26 : 32] The second thing to say here is this, and this may even be more significant than the fact that hope in the glory of God can give you a buoyancy in suffering, but it's more significant than that for us.

For many of us especially who grew up in the church and that's this, it frees you from the slavery of being happy. It frees you from the slavery of being happy.

Now what do we mean by that? Our normal mode of operation, even as Christians, is to allow our circumstantial happiness to dictate our inner disposition.

We forget the gospel. We forget the hope and the glory of God. In time, you actually start to let circumstantial happiness once again become that thing that dictates your inner disposition, the possibility of your joy.

What this is saying is that you've got to leave circumstantial happiness behind in order to get non-circumstantial joy. The disposition that never leaves no matter what the circumstance is, the disposition that says that joy and sorrow exist simultaneously, that Christians can grieve with those who grieve, they can be happy with those who are happy, but the thing that underlies that all the time is the disposition of utter joy.

[27 : 54] And the only way to get it is utter hope, hope in the glory of God. So it frees you from the slavery of being happy. In our tradition, don't hear me wrong, in our tradition, especially more than many others, in our Christian tradition, that this denomination comes from, we love the beauties of this earth.

We love good wine in our tradition. We love good food. We love good romance. We love the beauties of the earth. But what's being warned against here is falling into a position where circumstantial happiness, where you make the beauties of the earth into the beauty instead of seeing the beauties of the earth in light of the beauty, the true beauty, Jesus Christ Himself. All right, last thing I'll say, we'll be done. Lastly, hoping in the glory of God gives you a freedom to hope in your own glory.

Now, you've been listening to this, maybe you haven't. Now's a good time to start. God hopes in His glory, and that hope is not a guessing game.

It's completely sure. Jesus Christ will have His glory. Jesus is the glory, and He will have His glory. God will have His glory in the coming ages.

[29 : 18] The kingdom will be His. He will take authority. He already has. But what you may be asking that is you're saying, hoping the glory of God, hoping the glory of Jesus Christ manifest, but how is that actually hoping in my glory?

What about me? What about me? How is that actually hoping in my future glory? In any hope for me to have glory? You're talking about Jesus having glory. God having His glory.

What about me? John 14, 18, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

But a little while in the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. And that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

Look, here's the beauty of justification. Here's the beauty of what Paul's been talking about up to this point in Romans. God treats you in justification the same exact way that He treats His Son, Jesus Christ.

[30 : 23] When Jesus Christ died, you died. When Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, you were resurrected. When Jesus Christ comes against in glory, His very glory is your very glory.

That's the point Paul's trying to make about salvation. We call it the doctrine of union with Christ in theology. Jesus is for you. He is yours and you are His.

And what the Father has given him, the Father is going to give to you. His glory, your glory is completely wrapped up in His glory. And so the grand irony of all of history is this.

If you want to be happy, if you want to have happiness, if you want to have true joy, you have to look entirely outside of yourself. You have to look to the hope of the glory of God, the glory of Jesus Christ.

And here's the irony that when you leave yourself, when you become self-forgetful in that way, you actually have invested in the eternity of your own glory.

[31 : 22] It's the only way to get it. C.S. Lewis, we're closing with C.S. Lewis' quote, as I often do. C.S. Lewis in the weight of glory, an essay based off Paul's phrase, the weight of glory, in Corinthians, he asks this same question I've been asking, what are you hoping in, in a different way?

He wants to know, is your hope actually big enough? Are your current circumstantial hopes just too small? And this is how he puts it, one of the, you know, this quote is cliché, but sometimes things are cliché because they're good.

It would seem that our Lord finds our desires, our hopes, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy and hope is offered to us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies and a slum because he can't imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

What are you hoping in? Let's pray. Our Lord and our God, we ask that now your spirit would come and give us the hope that you promise is the only hope that can truly change us.

[32 : 46] The hope of Jesus Christ, the fact of Jesus Christ come for us and coming again for us. And so we ask now simply Lord that you would work that into our hearts, whether we've been Christians for 50 years or we're exploring the claims of Christianity today, would you make it known to us?

Would we know it? We ask that what's in our head would drop into our hearts. And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.