

The Blessed Life
Romans 15:13
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In Romans 15:13, Paul says, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Years ago I saw a Peanuts cartoon in which Lucy and Linus were sitting together in the living room watching television. Lucy said to Linus, “Would you go get me a drink of water?”

Linus said, “Why should I do anything for you? You never do anything for me.”

She immediately said, “Well, when you’re 75, I’ll bake you a birthday cake.”

Linus then got up, muttered under his breath as he walked to the kitchen and said, “Life is much more pleasant when you have something to look forward to.”

It’s true; life is much more pleasant when you have something to look forward to. That’s a great description of the Christian life. Right now we’re all anticipating, praying that the governor and our county officials would open up the restrictions, so we can gather again. The Lord willing, that will be very soon. But there is a greater event we’re looking forward to. There is a greater gathering that we’re looking forward to. We’re “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” We’ll all be gathered together then. And we won’t have to wear face masks in heaven. That’ll be pretty cool. We won’t wait in any lines in heaven. We’ll be there face to face with Jesus Christ, and our joy and peace will be brought to its fruition. Faith will be turned into sight. What a glorious hope that is for the believer!

Before salvation, when we were unbelievers, people described us being “without hope” and “without God.” When you are without God, you are without hope. But now that we have become believers, Romans 5:2 says that we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

In Romans 15:13, our text, Paul comes to the end of the doctrinal section of the book of Romans. And what a great doctrinal book Romans is. It has been described as Paul’s “theological last will and testament.” It’s the only epistle that is strategically and systematically laid out entirely to present a total theology of how God saves sinners, how God sanctifies sinners and God’s purpose and plan for the nation of Israel. Then Paul closes, in chapters 14-16, with very practical applications.

But when Paul closes the doctrinal section, he closes with this marvelous prayer or benediction for the believers in Rome. I believe it is also a marvelous prayer or benediction for our lives, even in what we are going through at this time. Paul lifts up his heart to God and prays for the believers to experience blessed lives on earth.

It’s a prayer for a blessed life. A blessed life is full of joy and peace and overflowing with hope.

This is the kind of blessed life that we, as believers, want to have and should experience. But how do we get it? We find, by looking at the prayer by Paul, five truths about the blessed life.

First, what is the source of the blessed life? Where does the blessed life of joy, peace and hope come from? The source of the blessed life is God. The blessed life comes from “the God of hope.” Isn’t that a great title for the God of the Bible? He’s “the God of hope.”

If you feel that you’re without hope right now, then turn to God, and He is the source of our hope. What a glorious thing that is!

Now the hope that is referred to here is not a hope so that it’ll come to pass. It’s a confident, settled, deep assurance. When the Bible speaks of hope, it’s not like, “Well, I hope it happens,” but it’s, “I know it will happen, and I’m looking forward to it.” So it’s a present hope that has a future fulfillment.

God is the source of our hope, so our hope is in God. And He is also the object of our hope. So He’s the source of our hope, and He’s the object of our hope. A person without God is a person without hope.

If you are without God, if you haven’t trusted Him, you haven’t looked to Him, then you are without hope. But as Christians, who have come to know God through Jesus Christ, we know “the God of hope.”

In verse 13, this “God of hope” is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is also the God of Genesis 1:1. It says, “In the beginning God...”—“Elohim”—“...created the heavens and the earth.” He is the God who spoke everything into existence.

This God of hope has always existed. Sometimes people ask, “Well, where did God come from?” He didn’t come from anywhere; God is eternal. Now I know we can’t comprehend that, we can’t fathom that and we don’t understand that. But that’s what the Bible teaches: He is eternal God, He is the self-existent God, He is the sovereign God and He is the creator God.

He is also a personal God. He isn’t just some active force that is dwelling out there in the cosmos that you can tap into the good side and the bad side. He is a powerful God, and He is a loving God. He is a God who wants to know you intimately and personally. John 3:16 says, “For God...”—this same “God of hope”—“...so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” So clearly the Bible declares that God is love, and He so loved that he “gave His only begotten Son.”

So He is an eternal God, a sovereign God, an all-wise God, a personal God, a powerful God and a loving God. But God is also the source of our hope and the object of our hope. So number one, a blessed life starts with God. It is a God-centered life.

Today if you are living your life without God, you’re living your life without hope. There really is no hope in government. There is no hope in man. Many are putting their hope in science right

now, but it has disappointed us many times of late.

Hope must be in God; He's the fixed point of all hope. It's a hope that will not die, a hope that will not be disappointed, a hope in one who will never change.

So if you haven't turned to God yet, turn to Him today. Maybe you're a Christian, but you haven't been thinking about God or praying to God, talking to God or growing in your knowledge of God through the Word. Use this time to turn back to Him and get in God's Word and find hope in God. Is God the center and source of your hope? Hope in God.

Secondly, in verse 13, I want you to note the quality of the blessed life. It says, "...fill you with all joy and peace." Notice it says He "fill[s]" us. The word "fill" here means "to overflow." I've never been to Niagara Falls, but I've heard it's amazing. I've seen pictures of it. Someday I may be able to see it in person and see that water pouring over the falls and the power and blessing that is there.

What a glorious thing that is to have a life that overflows with an abundance of joy. Before Jesus, life was empty and vain. Remember how your life was in your pre-conversion days? How empty life was? You were always trying to fill the void and the emptiness of your life. But now that you've come to Jesus, He is an artesian well, a waterfall of joy and peace.

God is the source of our hope and the source of our joy. Jesus said in John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." It's the same concept; Jesus said He wants us to have joy that remains in you, it comes from Him and overflows.

Do you find joy in Jesus? Is He the source of your joy? Any other source or focus of our joy is going to disappoint you and let you down.

Notice that Jesus will also fill us with peace. That's the Christian life; this verse is actually a description of the Christian life. He fills us with His peace.

Now we saw in Philippians 4 that there are two kinds of peace: peace with God, which is salvation, and the peace of God, which is our sanctification. In Romans 5:1, it says, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is no joy or peace for the unbeliever, because they don't have peace with God. You were made for God and to know God. So if you don't have that vertical relationship with God, all your horizontal relationships will be off kilter. So you must get right with God, be in a right relationship with God. And there is only one way to do that, and that is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross to bring you reconciliation, back into a relationship with God.

That war with God, that fighting with God needs to come to an end. You need to surrender to God. That "little, white flag" in your heart needs to go up. You need to surrender. You need to say, "God, I'm not going to fight You. I'm not going to resist You. I'm not going to run from You. I'm going to surrender to You today." Then you have peace with God.

Once you have peace with God—and only until you have peace with God—then you can experience the peace of God, Philippians 4:7. The peace of God guards, garrisons or protects your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. The Bible says, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You.” So you come to peace with God, and then you trust in God, walk with God and have His peace ruling and reigning in your heart. How glorious that is.

Peace is not the absence of trouble; certainly we have trouble right now. But it is “the peace that passes all understanding.” That’s because it comes through Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice the third point of the blessed life, in verse 13. The condition for having this joy, peace and hope is “in believing.” To get this is through faith in Jesus Christ or by trusting God. The condition for the blessed life is trusting, faith. We live by faith. The NIV translation says, “...as you trust Him.” It is the open hand that reaches out to God and receives God’s blessings.

Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” One of the greatest verses in the Bible comes from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. It says, “The just shall live by faith.” That’s how we live. We don’t live by sight, by our feelings or emotions. It’s hard to do, but now we must walk by faith—even when I don’t see Him, even when I don’t feel Him, even when I can’t sense His presence. But, by faith, I know He’s there. I’m trusting Him, living by faith and believing in His promises.

People often say to me, “Pastor John, I just wish I could have more faith.” Sometimes we forget that we all do have faith. We practice faith. But it’s the object of our faith that is important. What do you put your faith in? We get up every day and put faith in a light switch; when I flip the light switch, I’m doing it in faith that the lights will come on. When I get in the car and push the ignition button, I’m doing it in faith that the car will start. When I approach an intersection, and the light turns red, I put my foot on the brake in faith that the car will stop. You get in an airplane by faith. Think about how much faith it takes to get in an airplane! We trust so many things. People make us promises, and we believe them. Why not trust in God and believe His Word? So what does it mean to live by faith and believe Him? It means that we trust Him in every area of our lives.

Faith is faith in God. 1 John 5:9 says, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” If we can trust people and things, and sometimes even our government, but they let us down, we can trust God even more. Learn to live by faith in God.

I heard and learned, as a young boy growing up, the song:

“Trust and obey,

For there’s no other way

To be happy in Jesus,

But to trust and obey.”

How true that is. Simply to trust Him, simply to rest in Him and simply to be obedient to Him.

So the condition for having this blessed life is learning to live by faith. And don’t forget that “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” So feed on God’s Word, and let it fill your heart with faith. The blessed life is a life of faith and trust in God. He will not let you down.

This brings me to my fourth point, the consequences of the blessed life, in verse 13. The consequence of the blessed life is that “You may abound in hope.” So God wants you to believe, experience His joy and peace in order that “you may abound in hope.” Or, again, this means to “overflow in hope.”

We live in a world where people have lost their hope in nearly everything. I confess that I struggle right now, as you do, going through this time. We watch the news—why I don’t know—and we get no hope. Our hopes get dashed, because we anticipate that our state will begin to open up a little bit, but it hasn’t happened yet. It’s so hard not to get angry, disappointed and frustrated. So our hope must be in God, and our focus must be on God. That doesn’t mean that the storms will cease; it means that we keep trusting in Him.

I was thinking about Hebrews 11 this week. It is the great “hall of faith,” the chapter that has all the great men and women who have done great exploits through faith. But at the end of chapter 11, it says that others were not delivered; they were tortured, hid in “caves” and covered themselves with “sheepskins and goatskins” and “sawn asunder” and put to death. So sometimes God’s people will suffer, but we still have His joy, His peace, and we still have His hope, that the world cannot take away.

In Romans 15, we see the word “hope” used four times; in verse 4, Paul says, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.” “Through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures,” God brings us His hope. Notice verse 12: “And again, Isaiah says, ‘There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him, the Gentiles shall hope.’” So it’s talking about how even Gentiles come to hope and believe in God. Then in verse 13, Paul used the word “hope” twice: “the God of hope” and “abound in hope.”

So, again, the Christian hope is an assurance, a steadfast hope. It’s something we have now, and it’s something we look forward to in the future.

The big picture in the Scriptures is that this hope of the believer is the hope of heaven. We must not lose sight of that; we must keep our focus on that. I feel that in these last few months of lockdown, I’ve aged about 20 years. It’s made me think a little more about heaven. It’s made me realize that my tent is waxing old; it’s getting weaker every day. Paul talked about how “our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed every day.”

So don't be discouraged if you can't bend over and tie your shoes anymore. Don't be discouraged if you can't see or you can't hear like you used to be able to. Parts of your tent are starting to fall apart. But we have hope, and that hope gets brighter and brighter every passing day, as we anticipate the hope of heaven.

Titus 2:13 says that we are "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." And don't forget John 14:27, 1-2, where Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions..."—there's our hope of heaven—"...if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am, there you may be also." So we have the hope of heaven and Christ's return.

The fifth, and last point I want to make, from verse 13, is the enabling of the blessed life. Where does the power come from? What do we tap into to be able to experience this blessed life? Verse 13 says, "by the power of the Holy Spirit." There is an enabling power provided to God's people to be able to live with an overflowing joy and a peace and a hope. The word "power" is the Greek word "dunamis." We get our word "dynamic" or "dynamite" from it.

The blessed life is a life lived in the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit of God. You cannot live the Christian life without the Spirit of God. You can't be a Christian without the Spirit of God. Jesus said, in John 15:5, "Without Me you can do nothing." If you are trying to live for the Lord, without tapping into the Spirit of God, it'll be futile and vain. You can't do it.

The Holy Spirit is also necessary for salvation. Before you were saved, it was the third Person of this God of hope, the Holy Spirit, who comes to convict you or convince you that you are a sinner. The Bible says that He comes to "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment." When you come under the conviction that you are a sinner before God, that's the work of the Holy Spirit. That's the Holy Spirit opening your eyes and softening your heart, causing you to see your need for God. What a blessed thing that is! Then, in light of your need, you turn to Him, poor in spirit, mourning over your sin. Then you trust in Jesus and put your faith in Him. The Bible says that immediately, then, Christ comes in, by the Spirit, and regenerates you and gives you new life. Before, you were dead in sin, but now, you are alive in God. So you are now born again.

What Jesus told Nicodemus was that he had to be born again. Nicodemus was a very Jewish man; if anyone could get to heaven by being good, it was Nicodemus. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus asked Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old?"

Jesus said, "Unless one is born of...the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." It is through the work of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit brings life; He is the Holy Spirit of life. He regenerates you. He takes you out of Adam and places you into Christ.

And then the Holy Spirit has other functions. He indwells you permanently; He moves into you to stay. He'll never "leave you nor forsake you." He also seals you "to the day of redemption." It's the work of the Holy Spirit to put us in the church, the body of Christ.

Then you can't live a holy life without the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation, and He is necessary for sanctification. We can't be sanctified by the law, but we can be sanctified by God's Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

Third, the Holy Spirit is necessary for our work of service—to save us, to sanctify us, to enable us to serve. I know that many of you who serve around the church are missing your ministries. But God can place you somewhere to be a light, a witness or a blessing. You go to the grocery store, but I know it's kind of hard to encourage people, because you're speaking from under a mask. They have no idea if you're frowning, sticking out your tongue, being angry or whatever. But the Lord can still help you to be a blessing to others around you.

I find myself getting impatient, crabby and irritable with others. May God fill us with His peace, His love and His joy. And may we be a blessing in service to others.

So the blessed life—let's summarize this—is lived in fellowship with God, it's full of the joy and peace of God, it's lived by faith in God, it overflows in hope from God and it's empowered by the Spirit of God.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul commands us, as believers, to "be filled with the Spirit." That is a command in the Greek, an imperative. It is also inclusive in the Greek. That means that it is directed to everyone, to all believers; there are no exceptions. All believers must be filled with the Holy Spirit.

You say, "Well, I thought we were regenerated and indwelt and sealed?"

You are, but the filling of the Holy Spirit is something different. That's when the Holy Spirit controls you and empowers you—your words, your thoughts, your actions.

Then the command "be filled with the Spirit" is in the present tense. That means "be being filled with the Holy Spirit continually." Every day throughout the week, we must wake up and say, "God, fill me with Your Spirit today. Fill me with Your joy and peace. Help me to believe and trust in You. Help me to abound in hope. And help me to rely upon the power of Your Holy Spirit." It's all available to you and me through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In closing, Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." He didn't promise that life would be smooth—we know that right now. He didn't say that life would be easy. He said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

There is the God of hope, who has provided for us joy and peace, if we will believe. It comes to us through Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If today you haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, it means you haven't been born again. He hasn't come to dwell inside you. You don't have peace with God through Jesus Christ.

You can pray right now, in the privacy of your own home. Maybe you're all alone right now, and God is speaking to you, and you know you need to get right with God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." So you can bow your head, open your heart and pray the prayer right now, inviting Christ to come into your heart and life and to forgive you of your sins and to give you the hope of heaven.