

Abounding in Hope

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Today, we revisit our annual theme: Adding More in 2024. Surprisingly, we have reached the middle of the year. A brief evaluation of our progress is in order. To date, have we added more to our faith? Have we made any changes or adjustments to our lives for the sake of becoming more like Jesus? This is the goal of the theme.

This month's lesson comes from a statement from Paul in his Roman epistle. Romans is the crown jewel of Paul's epistles. This was not a hastily written letter, but a carefully composed dissertation. He explains how the promises that God made to Abraham were fulfilled through Jesus, the Messiah. He draws on the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets to show how Jesus fulfilled the hope of ancient Israel.

There is not much hope in our world. People are always looking for something or someone to offer them a better tomorrow. This only leads to disappointment at best and bitterness at worst. Paul explains how the only true hope the world can receive comes from faith in what God accomplished through Jesus, the Messiah.

Near the conclusion of his letter, Paul writes, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). Consider how we can abound in hope.

God Rules by Hope

1). The God of Hope. There are many mischaracterizations about our God. Some view God as a genie in a bottle. He exists to grant our wishes. Others think God exists only to give us wise advice. We can take his advice or leave it. Some think God is a bully. He takes pleasure in our pain and looks forward to crushing us for our mistakes. All mischaracterizations of God will lead to disillusionment and disappointment.

In this text, Paul describes God as "the God of hope." This is a curious description of God. This tells us something about how God views the direction of the universe. Like the ancients of the Greco-Roman world, many people today think human civilization is cyclical. There are renaissances followed by downfalls and then rinse and repeat. Others take a grimmer look at human civilization. They think we are on a crash course to oblivion. Neither view is correct.

God is taking the universe and human civilization in a clear direction. We are heading to a new world, a new heavens and earth. Humans are going to exist in this new world as fully themselves in ways we can only begin to imagine. All of this is made possible by Jesus,

His death, and resurrection. We can share in God's hope by believing in Jesus. Read Romans chapter eight if you are in doubt of what the God of hope has planned for us!

2). The Foundation of Hope. The hope of God has a foundation. This is what distinguishes true hope from the world's wishful thinking. The hope of God is rooted in history. Mainly, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

These events were real demonstrations of God's power. The dark powers of evil in the world do not have power over God. The prince of this world did not have power over God. Darkness was not able to extinguish the Light of the world. God proved by the resurrection of Jesus that He can recreate and renew.

In Romans, Paul explains how the events surrounding Abraham and Sarah proved God's creative power. He wrote, "...in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations..." (Romans 4:17-18). Abraham and Sarah believed in God. God gave them a child. They were marked out as righteous because they had faith in God.

By believing in the God that gives life to the dead, we can share in the hope of Abraham. Paul concluded this chapter by writing, "...he (Abraham DF) grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 4:20-24).

3). Being Sustained by Hope. When we believe in what God accomplished through Jesus, we begin a new life. This life is what Paul was considering when he encouraged the saints in Rome to "abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13).

The hope of living in God's new world with Jesus and the redeemed of all time brings us joy and peace. Having joy and peace is vital while living in a world of trouble. As believers, we are not exempt from the suffering of the world.

In Romans, Paul explains how believers can use suffering to strengthen their hope. In chapter five, he wrote, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:1-5).

Our character can be refined by faithfully enduring suffering. No matter how bad things become, our sense of hope can grow stronger. If we trust God, His Son, and the Spirit, the hope of God will not disappoint us. Of course, our hope cannot disappoint. Our hope comes from the God of hope, the God who gives life to the dead, who calls into existence things that do not exist.

Conclusion

Are you abounding in hope? If you are looking to the world to give you hope, you will be disappointed. You will likely be led to believe that you are headed on a crash course with oblivion. This is not the case. The God of hope has sent us salvation in the form of His Son, Jesus the Messiah. By faith, we can become the children of hope and lead others to follow.