

Sermon: Everlasting power Psalm 8 Romans 5:1-5

Today, Paul the apostle is joyfully sharing with us his confidence in God's love and power. For him, trusting faith has done what the Law could never do. Before Jesus came, no one had ever been really close to God. And here is a new relationship where we are declared righteous before God.

When our hope is in God, it cannot be turned to dust. When our hope is in God, it cannot be disappointed. When our hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, because God loves us with an everlasting love known to us by everlasting power. The apostle outlines the benefit of this power for us in many ways. We're all aware of benefits packages from the work world, right? Here's a story I came across this week.

Reaching the end of a job interview, the Human Resources Person asked a young accountant, who was fresh out of school, "What starting salary were you thinking about?" The young accountant said, "In the neighborhood of 100,000 a year, depending on the benefits package". The interviewer said, "Well, what would you say to a package of 10 weeks vacation, full medical and dental, Company Retirement Fund to 50% of salary, Executive Share Option Scheme, Profit Related Pay and a company car leased every 2 years - say, a 5 series BMW?" The young accountant sat up straight and said, "Wow! Are you kidding?" The interviewer replied, "Yes, but you started it".

In the 1950's, evangelist Billy Graham wrote the book, "Peace with God". In it is the understanding that our relationship with God changes over time. Not so long ago, in Western society, we were aware we were out of sync with God and tried our best to turn back towards God. Today however, the thinking is different. There seems to be a ubiquitous desire to romanticize God into a loving Daddy figure; a cross between Santa Claus and the Easter bunny. The result is that we don't respect God for Who and What God is, but rather we recognize an impotent God who accepts what we choose to give, asks little of us, gives us great flexibility in life, and never exercises divine discipline. What we learn from the Bible is that; while God is a God of love; He is also a God of wrath against all sin. When God shows us our sin, offers us forgiveness in Jesus, and we accept His offer of life, it is then our peace with Him is restored. Jesus said so. "My peace I leave with you".

It is through Jesus that we are ushered into God's presence, sanctuary, and safe harbour. When we try to depend on our own efforts we are tossed about like mariners battling a threatening sea. We can be completely overwhelmed. But hearing the Word of God in the words of Christ, we have; at last; arrived safely in the shelter of God's grace, and we know the calm of depending; not on what we can do for ourselves; but on what God has done for us.

When we come to Christ, we have the best of two worlds. We are both born into the family of God, and adopted; or reborn; through our faith in Jesus Christ. We can stand in God's presence because we are birthed through His Son, and we can stand in God's presence forever because as adopted children, we can never be disowned. In His love, grace, and mercy, God has made a way for us to stand before Him.

Paul rejoices, and whether we think we have a reason or not, we should praise God

and we should rejoice, also. Even in prison, Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always, I’ll say it again, rejoice”. No matter what we face, praise God. Even Jesus saw the joy set before Him, when He endured the cross for us. The joy which He saw was the result of you and me coming to faith. Jesus found joy in the cross because of the outcome.

We can praise God in the good times because of the hope He’s given to us, and we can praise God in our times of struggle because out of even these, some wonderful things happen in and for us. “Suffering”, Paul said, “produces endurance”. In fact, circumstances like sorrow, persecution, unpopularity, and loneliness; all these produce fortitude, which is even greater than endurance. It means God’s Spirit within us can overcome the world; not by passively enduring; but by actively overcoming each and every trial we can face head on. When Beethoven was threatened with deafness; that most terrible of troubles for a musician; he said: “I shall seize fate by the throat. It will never bend me completely to its will”. Closer to home, when Canadians were taunted with becoming a 51st state, we said, “elbows up”. That’s fortitude! Fortitude is not the spirit which lays down and lets the floods go over it. It is the spirit which meets things head-on and overcomes them with God’s help.

For much of our lives in the church, we have heard the prophet Jeremiah’s words, “for I know the plans I have for you”, says the Lord. God plans for each of us to grow in our faith. Have you noticed that when the Christian church is enjoying easy times, somehow the supernatural, spiritual, and significant power of the church is virtually non-existent, but during times of challenge and uncertainty, the power of God is unleashed in and through Christ’s church? Apathy does not address problems. They’re still there when we return to them. And when we face them head-on with endurance and patience, we begin to develop character.

A person of character is not one who does the right thing only when people are looking. They’re the one who does the right thing *because* it’s the right thing. Character, when it is proven, gives hope. Jesus could see beyond the struggle, the tests of patience and fortitude, and even beyond the need to possess character, to the joy of the desired outcome. We can too. This is God’s path for every one of us.

Character produces hope. Two people can meet the same situation. It can drive one of them to despair, and the other to focused action. To the one, it can be the end of hope, and to the other, it can be a challenge to race toward the goal. “I do not like crises”, British Lord Reith once said, “but I do like the opportunities they provide”. This difference corresponds to the difference among people. When a person allows themselves to be overwhelmed by a crisis, they may succumb to despair, but when a person meets life with their head up, then they meet it with eyes open to hope. The character which has endured the test always emerges in hope.

When we are faced with pain and suffering; no matter the cause; we have a choice to make. Will I trust God and draw close to Him, or will I doubt Him and turn away? God sees our pain, and more than simply removing the pain and bringing restoration, God is really concerned about the condition of our hearts and who we are becoming. God wants to comfort and deliver us, and He wants to walk intimately with us. He wants us to be spiritually strong; transforming us more and more into the likeness of His son, Jesus Christ; scars and all.

Consider you are walking through an apple orchard, and you notice some trees are loaded down with fruit while other trees have a lot of leaves but very little fruit. You examine one of these trees loaded down with apples, and notice gashes and gouges on the trunks and on some of the larger branches. You ask the owner of the orchard, "Why is that?" The owner says, "We discovered a long time ago that when you take a healthy apple tree that may not be producing a lot of fruit, and you cut it, gouge it, or slash it, there is something in that tree that causes it to respond in a positive way. It never fails. The trees with the most scars produce the greatest fruit". Sometimes God allows us to bear these scars because He knows it will lead to fruitfulness. "This is to my Father's glory", Jesus said, "that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples".

So, when you are experiencing personal challenges; whether physical, emotional, or spiritual; our hope is in the love of God, because God's love can never be an illusion. God loves us with an everlasting love known to us by everlasting power. How majestic is your name in all the earth, dear Lord. To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.

Blessings to you, and if you would like a visit, a chat, or a prayer, please contact me at royalmail@hurontel.on.ca or (519) 441-1724.

Robert