

Peace Hope and Purpose

Romans 5:1-8/Matt 9:36-10:8

Our theme today is Peace, Hope and Purpose. I tried for three Ps but it just didn't work.

When I was at college I was always taught to preach Good News, to preach God's Grace. Well our Romans passage today is an absolute gift as it sets out our message of hope and Good News. We have been justified through faith, in other words, we have not, cannot earn God's favour, we have peace with God because we believe in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, because of His death and resurrection, we have gained access, in other words been brought in to God's Grace which is where we now stand. Grace is often described as God's unmerited favour towards us, we haven't earned it He gives it freely to us. I have also heard Grace described as the empowering presence of God. In other words we now stand in the empowering presence of God. And because we have Peace with God through Jesus, because we have His favour and His empowering presence then we can boast in the hope that we have that our present and our future is to be with Him in His Glory. And skipping to the end of our passage we are reminded that at just the right time, when we were powerless to help ourselves, God demonstrated His love for us by Jesus, God incarnate, dying for us on the cross, so that we might be forgiven and brought into the very presence of God, to stand in the grace that we have just been talking about. We have been given the most precious gifts of peace and hope. We have been rescued from fear and death and can now, right now and forever stand in the life-giving presence of God. Wow, that is just incredible and we should feel that wow every time we remember what Jesus has done for us and who we are now that we belong to Him.

But then there is this difficult bit in the middle that talks about suffering. We glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character and character hope and hope does not

Peace Hope and Purpose

Romans 5:1-8/Matt 9:36-10:8

put us to shame because God's love is being (this is a continuous tense) poured out in to our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Now we know that as Christians we are not necessarily spared suffering. Everyone suffers at some time in their lives. We are human beings living in a fallen world that has rejected God and suffering is the consequence for all human beings. And yes we can see that suffering does produce perseverance, character etc, all that is true of our human physical and emotional suffering and God cares about our suffering and promises to be with us in it. However the suffering that Paul is talking about here is not our human trials and tribulations. The word used for suffering in this passage, Thlipsis in the Greek is literally translated, pressures and is only used in a fairly specific way in the New Testament to refer to the opposition that we will face in a hostile world. You see we receive salvation as a free gift, we are given peace with God, we stand in His Grace and we have Hope but we are also given purpose when we become citizens of the Kingdom of God. There are things that God has for us to do. Our first purpose is simply to be in relationship with Him and to worship Him, this is what we were designed for. But as Jesus said in the Matthew reading, there is a harvest, many many others who do not yet know, have not yet heard the message of peace and hope and reconciliation with God that we have received. And our purpose is to tell others in every possible way that we can. And we will come across opposition, this is the suffering that Paul is talking about. People may be aggressively opposed to us, that may not happen very often. The main place that I get any kind of aggressive opposition and even that is relatively mild, is from the few parents who would rather their children didn't attend a Church School and would rather I didn't tell the children about Jesus. Of course we know that many of our brothers and sisters in other countries face real persecution and physically suffer for their

Peace Hope and Purpose

Romans 5:1-8/Matt 9:36-10:8

faith. The main opposition we find is probably indifference. And that can be really hard. We want to share what we know is true and people just don't want to hear it, they are indifferent, they do not think that what have to say is relevant to their lives in any way. Now this can certainly produce pressure, and cause us to need to develop perseverance, in many cases it can be a long hard road on which we can sometimes feel that we are making little progress. But perseverance does produce character and character hope, because God does continue to pour His love into our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit. His love for the hurting world, His love for hurting people, His love for all of the last, the least and the lost, near and far.

At the beginning of Matthew 10 Jesus calls the apostles by name, Simon, Andrew, James, John..... He calls them by name and sends them out. Here He sends out the twelve together, later He will send out 72 in pairs, all called by name and sent. And He has called you by name and me by name and He is sending us out. Now you might well feel inadequate to be send anywhere, to do anything, let alone proclaim the Good News that that the Kingdom of God is near. Don't worry, most of the time, I feel exactly the same way! Let's just look at the process for the moment. First Jesus has compassion on the people He sees. As followers of Jesus we are called to imitate Him. We are called to care, to allow God to continue filling us with His love by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to fill you with His love and His compassion for the people you know and the people you meet. The next think that happens is that He tells the disciples to pray to the Father to send out workers, to meet the needs of the people who are lost. So we are called to care and we are called to pray. That doesn't seem so hard does it? It is really essential that we care as God cares, that we see people as He sees them and love them with His love. And we can all do that, just as we can all pray. Next Jesus gave the

Peace Hope and Purpose

Romans 5:1-8/Matt 9:36-10:8

disciples authority, he trained them and equipped them and gave them His authority. So we need to be prepared to receive training and equipping. We are not called to do anything in our own strength. He gave the disciples authority to do the things that He wanted them to do and He gives us that same authority. I am not going to tell you what God wants you to do, you have to ask Him. We all have different gifts and He calls us all to do different things. But we are all called to bear witness to His amazing love and saving Grace by loving Him, loving each other and loving others as we have been loved. And to do that we have to learn to receive from Him. To receive His love, to receive what gifts He wants to give us and to receive His authority. So we are all called care, called to pray called to receive and finally we're called to go. Jesus sends us as surely as He sent the twelve and then the 72. As I said, I don't know what He is calling you to do, where He's calling you to go. It may be to your next door neighbour, it may be to smuggle bibles in to China. It may be that you are a prayer warrior, called to pray and intercede for others (say about Prayer pastors). It may be that you are called to support the ministry of others financially (say about Claire Grimble). The harvest is great, the needs are many. You are not called to do it all, only what God tells you to do. You should not feel guilty because you are not doing what someone else is doing, or if someone else seems more effective or more fruitful. Just be faithful to what God wants you to do. You have no idea how important your small act of kindness, your simple prayer, your financial gift, your testimony of God's love will be, only God has the big picture. If you feel that your efforts are met with opposition or indifference, then persevere and grow in hope as you allow God to continue pouring His love in to your heart. Stand in His Grace, His undeserved favour and His empowering presence, and

Peace Hope and Purpose

Romans 5:1-8/Matt 9:36-10:8

know that you have been called by name to care, to pray, to receive and to go, in Jesus name. Amen