

## **“The Bridge of Hope” Part II**

### **The Superstructure of God’s Love**

(Romans 5:1–11)(12.20.20)

Romans 5:1–11 (NIV84) *Peace and Joy*

**5** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup>Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! <sup>10</sup>For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup>Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

Title: **“The Bridge of Hope” Part II**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

This week, our bishop sent out a Christmas greeting email to pastors and church leaders. I am sure that some of you received it too.

Don and Carol,

In a year filled with disaster and despair, *hope rises*.

In a time of disease and distancing, *hope rises*.

In a moment, a star rises, *hope is born*.

Thank you for your service to the church and world.

*You are hope for us.*

***Merry Christmas,***

***Bishop John and Beverly Schol***

Yes, Christmas is a season of hope. In a world that cries out for a solution, hope rises. When sickness and isolation create barriers, hope sustains. Notice that the Bishop connects hope and action. By serving the Church and the world, we become hope. We are reminded of the Christmas Star that leads people to the baby Jesus, the ultimate gift of hope.

Paul tells us that we can have confidence in this hope because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. There is a direct connection. This love is not dormant or an abstract. It is not some type of empty words or a turn of a phrase. It was demonstrated, proved, shown, and commended in the Messiah’s death.

John 15:12–13 (NIV84) Jesus said, <sup>12</sup>“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

1. What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!

What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss

to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

BODY:

You see on the screen, The Bridge of Hope that I first showed you last week. It is an illustration of what Paul is teaching us in Romans 5 that we just read. We start on this bridge in our new birth and our pilgrim journey ends in the flesh but goes on to glory in eternal life. The work of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit hold up this bridge of hope. The supernatural love of God is the superstructure for this bridge that holds everything together.

The Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, used a similar illustration of a bridge for this scripture: "You may live without Christ now, but it will be hard work to die without Him. You might do without this bridge here; but when you get to the river you will think yourself a fool to have laughed at the only bridge which can carry you safely over."

I have added the picture of the cross this week because we cannot talk about the love of God and leave out the cross of Christ. Although, in many churches across our nation, God's love is trumpeted while the cross is relegated to the Friday before Easter. Why? Because it is unpopular to talk about sin. The preacher doesn't want to offend anyone. And besides, the definition of sin changes all the time, right? Yes, by the silly-putty standards of the culture; but NO, not by the rock solid righteousness of God's law as laid out in the scriptures.

Christ died for us, you and me, and every sinner, every person, who has ever lived. Paul develops his argument. To be blunt, very rarely, almost never, would anyone die for a righteous man. For a good man; he uses four consecutive words that each when taken alone creates doubt, but by running them together, it is extremely unlikely: someone – might – possibly – dare to die.

Christ died for us: we who were powerless. We were powerless to be righteous and good for any significant time. In fact, the scriptures tell us that we are unable to proclaim the name of Jesus unless the Holy Spirit makes it so. We were ungodly. We were still sinners. Nevertheless, Christ died for us. We can do nothing to earn God's love, His grace, His mercy.

It is God's nature to seek after His children.

In Hosea **11:1-4**, **God said**, "When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.

<sup>2</sup> But the more I called Israel,  
the further they went from me.

They sacrificed to the Baals  
and they burned incense to images.

<sup>3</sup> It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
taking them by the arms;  
but they did not realize  
it was I who healed them.

<sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with ties of love;  
I lifted the yoke from their neck  
and bent down to feed them.

Yes, Christ died for them. Christ died for us.

Some years ago, in a public park in Eugene, Oregon, a sand and gravel company erected a giant cross. They did not have permission to do so. However, through the years the cross became a symbol to the people of Eugene. Especially at Christmas, when the cross was lighted brilliantly and sent its rays of faith and hope shining through the city, did the people appreciate it.

But with the current feelings of anti-religion becoming more prominent, a movement to have the cross removed gathered momentum. A lawsuit was filed by a Unitarian minister and the court ruled that the

cross had to be removed because it violated the principle of the separation of church and state. An appeal was made to the State Supreme Court.

The higher court ruled that the cross could stay because it was simply a symbol, universally accepted, and now has no religious significance, and thus does not violate the principle of the separation of church and State.

Did the Oregon State Supreme Court rule correctly? I would say the result was correct, but the reasoning was flawed. — Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. would agree with me. He said, “Calvary is a telescope through which we look into the long vista of eternity, and see the love of God breaking forth into time.”

Let us examine more fully the great promise of God’s love poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Whenever we pour out something, it eventually ends. Not so with God’s love. Hear Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians:

Ephesians 3:14–21 (NIV84) *A Prayer for the Ephesians*

<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp **how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

<sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus **throughout all generations**, for ever and ever! Amen.

The next thing to notice is that we ourselves are the receptacle of all the love for which we develop a capacity. In our inner being, in our heart, is the vessel of God’s love. The active cause, the operator and director of that love is God the Holy Spirit; so, the target cannot be missed. My friends, if we are thusly filled, it is not possible for God’s love to be contained within us; it must flow out of us; it must flow through us.

J. Vernon McGee said, ““So here Paul has brought together faith and love and hope, the three tenses of the Christian life: the work of faith, which looks back to the Cross and produces good works in the life; the labor of love, which is the present basis and motivation on which a child of God is to serve Christ; and the patience of hope, which looks into the future. What a wonderful trinity of Christian graces! It should be the biography of every believer.”

“Last week, I shared with you Katie Davis Majors’ story of Katherine and her five children. After nursing Katherine and taking care of the children for several months, Katherine died an agonizing death. While Katie Majors’ heart was broken, she realized in her pleading prayers and expectant hope, she had grown closer to the Lord.

Did you wonder what happened to the children? Because Katie already had 13 adopted daughters, she was unable to take them in permanently. They were sent to live with extended family members, but the children were not thriving under their care. Katie and Amazima Ministries sent support, but five children required too much time and energy for the extended family. Katie tells us,

“On a Tuesday morning, I shared with a friend my devastating realization that I just didn’t know how to make sure Katherine’s children were taken care of; it seemed we had exhausted all our options. That very same afternoon, I went to visit our friend Rose to talk about something different entirely. However, it wasn’t lost on me what a phenomenal mother she was and the fact that her youngest would be leaving for boarding school in just one more year. In the back of my mind, I wondered if she would be a good candidate for becoming a foster mom, but I knew I could never ask this of someone. She and I prayed together and I began to speak, but not halfway through my first sentence, she interrupted me. “Before we talk about that,” she began, “I just have to ask you about those children who used to stay with you, the ones who lost their mother.” I listened, surprised. “God just keeps putting them on my

heart. I'm sure you have them well taken care of and they are fine, but I just feel that I wouldn't be obeying the Spirit if I didn't ask you if they need anything. If there is anything I can do? If even, maybe, they need someplace to go?"

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. The memory verse I had recited with my children that morning during homeschool rang through my ears, their little voices shouting with excitement: "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God...And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Without a doubt, the Spirit had come before me and prepared Rose's heart for something that was much bigger than anything I could dream up. Her eyes glistened as I explained the situation the children were in. Rose had been a short-term foster parent before but recently had been praying about becoming a long-term one, specifically for these children, whom she'd observed when we brought them with us to church. Convinced that God had provided her as the answer to my prayers, we made plans to speak to the family later that day. When we explained to them Rose's offer, the aunts and uncles felt as blessed as I had at the thought of these children having a permanent and stable home with a strong and loving mother just around the corner from their biological family, who would be able to see them often. We began pursuing the paperwork necessary to make it happen.

Meanwhile, I invited Rose to join us for dinner the following Sunday so we could officially introduce Katherine's children to their new foster family. It was only later that I realized that Sunday would be Mother's Day, which seemed like extra confirmation from God, a wink and a nod to say, I am in this. We introduced the children to her, and they crowded around her on the couch. The two little boys were quick to smile and run back to play, but the girls, a little bit older and grasping more clearly what this meant, did not leave Rose's side for the rest of the evening. Together we cooked, shared a meal, and did dishes. Later, as Rose and I sat on the couch chatting about the future, all our children – mine, hers, Katherine's – danced and sang loudly in a circle on the front porch.

I peered out the window at them and was overwhelmed at the joy God had given and continued to give, the resilience of these little hearts laughing and playing together. My fierce prayer was that they would always remember the joy He had given us in this place. The words I had read in my devotional earlier that morning rang through my mind as I watched them double over in laughter:

The difference between shallow happiness and a deep, sustaining joy is sorrow. Happiness lives where sorrow is not. When sorrow arrives, happiness dies. It can't stand pain. Joy, on the other hand, rises from sorrow and therefore can withstand all grief. Joy, by the grace of God, is the transfiguration of suffering into endurance, and of endurance into character, and of character into hope – the hope that has become our joy does not (as happiness must for those who depend on it) disappoint us.

There had been trials and pain, so many imperfect days. There had been deep sorrow. But up out of our sorrow, God brought joy. Hope in Him had become our sustaining joy – joy that could never disappoint us."

CONCLUSION:

We traditionally close our Christmas Eve service here at Emmaus with the Carol, "Joy to the World."

He (Jesus) rules the world with truth and grace,

And makes the nations prove,

The glories of His righteousness,

And wonders of His love,

And wonders of His love,

And wonder, wonders of His love.

Galatians 2:20 (NIV84) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me** and gave himself for **me**. 1 John 3:1 (NIV84) How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

And that is what we are! Romans 8:28 (NIV84) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Psalm 33:18–22 (NIV84)

<sup>18</sup> ... the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him,  
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,

<sup>19</sup> to deliver them from death  
and keep them alive in famine.

<sup>20</sup> We wait in hope for the Lord;  
he is our help and our shield.

<sup>21</sup> In him our hearts rejoice,  
for we trust in his holy name.

<sup>22</sup> May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord,  
even as we put our hope in you.

And wonders of His love,

And wonders of His love,

And wonder, wonders of His love.

AMEN & AMEN. Let us pray