

Indelible Hope, Unbreakable Love

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[0 : 00] I want to just take a little while to think about what we were reading together in Romans chapter 5. So Joe read a little while ago Romans chapter 5 and there's a verse in there that I've always really loved.

It's stuck with me over decades of my life now. And it's a verse that says this, God shows his love to us in this way or God demonstrates his love to us in this way. Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

So we're in very hard circumstances right now, many of us. Certainly unusual circumstances and a lot of constraints that we're not used to. And when we get sucked into circumstances that feel so out of our control, it's really easy to start to feel downhearted, overwhelmed, uncertain and anxious.

I was reading a book this week and it was letters written by a Christian minister called Jack Miller. Jack Miller. And Jack Miller lost his own father when he was two years old.

He lost a brother when he was young. Jack battled through cancer and heart attacks and strokes. And in one of the letters, he's writing to another friend who's going through really hard circumstances.

[1 : 16] And this is what he says. He says, In suffering, the place to begin is not with the painful experience, but with the love of God.

In suffering, the place to begin is not with the painful experience, but with the love of God. And when we see the love of God, then we begin to view our painful circumstances in a new light. So that's kind of what we want to do today is just to kind of get a bit more of a view of the love of God. And put that front and center on everything so that we can then begin to see our difficult circumstances in a new light.

We want to let the greatness and the goodness of God's love shine its bright light into our circumstances today. We want to let the voice of God's love be the loudest voice in our lives today. So when we're looking at our circumstances, when we see the pain and the suffering in the world around us, that does sometimes cause us to question and doubt. Where's God's love?

[2 : 24] And Paul, the apostle, is saying, When we feel like that, when we feel so uncertain, we look to the cross and we see a love that conquers our doubts and that puts our hearts at rest.

So some of you probably don't tune into church very much or go to church very often. Some of you I know are people who are trying to figure out, What is a Christian?

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Is that something that I want in my life personally? And at the beginning of this chapter, chapter 5, Paul talks about being justified through faith.

So he says, Since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So the chapter begins with a bang. And Paul says, This is what it is to be a Christian. It's somebody who's been justified through faith. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ and his offer of life, then we are brought into a right relationship with God.

[3 : 33] That's what it means to be justified, to live in right relationship with God. So it's faith in Jesus that restores our relationship with God. That's Paul's great argument here in this letter that he wrote to the church in Rome in the first century.

And so for us, if we're trying to figure out what does it mean to be a Christian, it's not about what we do, but it's about putting our faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us, that loving act of self-sacrifice on the cross.

In the early part of this letter to the church in Rome, Paul says, Everybody's sinned. Everybody's broken. Everybody's gone wrong in their relationship with God.

Everybody bears that guilt. Whether you're religious, whether you're rebellious, or whether you're respectable, whoever we are, we've all sinned, and we all need our relationship with God restored

and put right through Jesus Christ.

In Romans chapter 3, Paul says this, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

[4 : 42] And now in chapter 5, Paul's saying, Well, if you've been justified by faith, if you have this new relationship with Jesus Christ, there are some amazing benefits that you can take hold of right now that will help you face this turbulent time with hope and with joy and with peace and with comfort.

And there's two of these things that I really want to kind of just dig into for a few moments with you. The first is this, that when we have faith in Jesus Christ, then we are given an indelible hope.

And then the second is that when we have faith in Jesus Christ, we're given an unbreakable love.

So indelible hope, unbreakable love. I really hope that by this time in my life, as I enter my early 50s, I would still have a full head of hair, a bouffant, luxuriating, wavy hair.

But during my 20s and 30s, my hope faded. Some of you might be putting your hope in all kinds of different things.

You might hope that one day you'll be the new Billy Elish or the new PewDiePie. But as we get older, we realize not all our hopes come true.

[6 : 08] Hopes fade. We might hope for a massive pension pot. We might hope we're going to lose lots of weight.

But somehow we realize it's not happening. Hope fades. We probably hope that the coronavirus would not impact on our lives in any meaningful way.

But that hope's gone. We're all affected. But the hope that we find in Jesus is written in indelible ink. It never fades. It's a sure and certain hope. It's a hope that shines as brightly today as when God first painted it. And it's a hope for the future.

Paul talks about it as being a hope in the glory of God. So that's there in verse 2. We boast in the hope of the glory of God.

[7 : 08] So it's a hope for the future. If you're not a Christian, that might be a kind of strange or new idea to you. What do I mean? Well, every Christian lives with this incredible hope.

That one day we'll be face to face with God. And in that moment that we will see his glory. A kind of unutterable beauty beyond anything that we ever anticipated seeing or knowing.

And when we see God in all his glory. In that moment, all our sorrow and all our troubles will be behind us.

That's a hope that currently lies in the future. But as Christians, we see it as a sure and certain hope. Because it's based on something that happened in the past.

Christ died on the cross. Paid the price of sin. Reconciled us to God. And so it's a future hope, but it's a certain hope.

[8 : 12] And it's a hope that makes a real difference. Not just for the future, but actually makes a difference in how we experience and encounter life today. Because verse 2 also tells us that God shows his family, shows his children, shows his people, a love we don't deserve and can never earn.

Every day, God shows us love we don't deserve and can never end. Doesn't matter how well we're doing in life or how badly. Life's not about karma. It's about grace.

And God's family always stand in his grace. Verse 2 says that, that through Jesus Christ and faith in him, we now stand in God's grace.

For every single day of our lives, the grace of God is a never-ending stream. God always brings his favor to us in hard situations, no matter what we deserve or how we're doing.

God will always bring strength to our weakness. God will always bring forgiveness to our disasters. God will always bring peace to our pain.

[9 : 18] God will always be present and active in the circumstances of our lives. We have hope for the future and glory with God. And we've got grace for today.

A peace in our current circumstances. So this indelible hope changes the way we suffer. Because as we suffer, we see that the hope of God is real and present.

God's power is with us to help us and sustain us. So when hard things come into the Christian's life, that doesn't delete our hope. It deepens our hope.

It matures us. When we see how God is still with us, even in the hardest and the darkest places, then we know that our hope is indelible.

So I was talking to somebody this week, a friend, who got a really difficult medical diagnosis. Not good news at all. And we were just chatting that through over the phone.

[10:19] And one of the things she said to me is she says, I've always known this truth from the Bible. He will never leave me or forsake me. And she said, and now that truth is becoming more real and more precious.

God is present in all our circumstances of life, no matter how good or bad. And God's grace is so amazing that he takes the hard things and he turns them to good.

The worst thing that ever happened, the death of Jesus Christ, crucified on a cross, God turns it to good. He raises Jesus to life for our salvation. In the Old Testament, Joseph is sold by his brothers into slavery.

But God rescues him from that situation and uses him to save the world from famine. And Joseph, at the end of that story, says, listen, he says to his brothers, you meant this for evil, but God meant it for good.

God takes the worst circumstances and redeems them for our blessing. When we stand in front of God to see his glory, one of the glorious things we'll see is how God has taken all the sad and the hard things in our lives.

[11:38] And turned them on their heads and brought good out of them. We'll see his wisdom and his power to redeem our suffering and to bless us with it.

So God's indelible hope. So many things that we put our hope in that are gone right now. Feelings of progress, prosperity, the things that give us pleasure.

A lot of those hopes have faded. How easily we see now that the things that we take for granted can be lost really quickly.

But Jesus is an indelible hope. But Jesus is also an unbreakable love. So God doesn't just pour hope into our lives. He pours love into our lives.

When we have faith in Jesus, we receive a massive injection of love that comes into our lives to vaccinate us against despair and fear.

[12:37] So verse 8 says that God demonstrates his love to us in this way. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And in that verse, God is shouting really loudly and is saying, pay attention, pay attention.

Look over here.

Don't just watch Netflix. Watch this. I'm demonstrating something important. I love you. God's saying, binge on good news, not just on Netflix.

God's saying, let the loudest voice in your room be the voice that comes to you through the word of God and says, I love you. I have always loved you.

I will always love you. I love you right now. God demonstrates his love to us. That's in the present tense. It's not just something that's happened in the past. It's something that God is doing today.

[13:57] Right here, right now, in this moment and in every moment, God says, I am showing you love through my son, Jesus Christ. In verse 5 of this chapter, God says, I am pouring my love into your life right now through the Holy Spirit.

Later in this letter, Paul, the apostle will write and say, God's spirit is witnessing to your spirit that you are his children. Pay attention. Pay attention. Pay attention. Pay attention. Pay attention. Pay attention. Pay attention.

God is talking to you as his family, as his children and saying, I love you. So the loudest voice right now shouldn't just be the internet or the news.

It should be this voice. God saying, I've shown my love. I'm showing my love. I'm telling you about my love right now. God loves us even when life is hard.

Being a first century Christian in Rome was like having the plague. You would lose your job. You'd lose your social standing, your friends and family, and probably eventually your life. These Christians in Rome needed to know that God loved them.

[15:05] We can look around the messiness of the world and the messiness of our own circumstances and doubt, is God's love real? And God says, yes, I'm demonstrating my love to you right now through my son, Jesus Christ.

Listen to the voice of my spirit. Listen to what I'm saying in my word. Know that I love you. We might not always understand what God is doing in our lives and the world around us.

But God is saying, you cannot doubt my love. Because I loved you while you were still sinners. God said, I loved you when you were at your lowest, at your darkest, at your worst.

I loved you completely then. And I love you just as much now. My love hasn't varied or changed. I loved you when you didn't love me.

I loved you even when you hated me. Sin is our deep refusal to live in relationship with God. It's a total rejection of him. But when we reject and defy God, God comes after us and pursues us in his love.

[16:15] While we were still sinners, God comes to win us back through his son, Jesus, taking our sin and guilt, dying in our place. He loved you when you were lost in sin.

He still loves you now, today, in this moment, as his child. And that's the loudest voice of all in the universe. Don't know what the biggest thing you conceive of is in this whole world.

The vast reaches of the universe. The distant horizons of time. Don't know what the biggest idea your mind can grasp is. But however great that thought might be, God's love for you is infinitely more.

God gave his eternal beloved son to die for people like us. His love has depths that are vast and unquantifiable.

Jesus didn't die for the righteous or for the good. But for rebels, for enemies, for sinners, for transgressors, for people who are crucifying him. That's not some other group of people.

[17:18] That's us. We reject God, but God doesn't retaliate. Instead, he comes and he takes our place in the cross. He takes our spot and dies to take the consequences of our sin in himself.

In a world where the virus of sin has infected every person, God sends his son, allowing him to become infected and to die so that we can be healed and saved.

God's love for you is real, personal, loving, endless, forgiving, gracious, kind.

So I want to say, listen hard for that love. Sometimes it's really hard to hear what God's saying when we're distracted all the time by our smartphones. And we live in a culture that lacks any sense of transcendence and ultimate hope.

So to hear the voice of God, sometimes we really do have to slow down, step out of what we're normally doing, turn off the news, turn off our social media feeds, and just listen.

[18:22] To listen to how God loves us. In the book I was reading, *Servant-Hearted Leader*, The Letters of Jack Miller. Jack Miller says this. It's necessary to stop, be patient, and listen to God.

Right now, in the circumstances that overwhelm. Right now, when I'm tempted to feel left out and hurt. There I meet his grace as he meets me in the silence.

We can depend on God's love. The Apostle John wrote, We know and rely on the love God has for us. God's great love is shown through the death of Jesus on the cross.

That's the thing you can rely on. Even if you feel right now that R-E-M were right, and it's the end of the world as we know it, God's love is something we can still depend upon.

The God who gave up his son so that his enemies can become his friends can be trusted even in the most confusing times. Jack Miller's daughter wrote about him and said, Jack knew how easy it was to despair in hard circumstances, to have all of your thought life consumed by them.

[19:37] But he constantly encouraged those who were suffering to meditate on the love of God. So every Sunday at Cornerstone, I give people a Thursday thought, So you listen to a sermon for 15, 20 minutes.

I want you to take one thing away that you might still remember on Thursday morning when you wake up. So what's our Thursday thought this week? What do I want you to remember when you wake up on Thursday morning?

You think, what was church about on Sunday? Well, the Thursday thought is just this verse, verse 8. God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That's a personal message for me today, for my hope, for my joy, for my peace. And it's a personal message for you today, for your hope, for your joy, and for your peace as well.

Let me just pray. I'm going to give Fergus a chance to sing another song, and then we're finished. Lord God, we thank you that we can just hear good news this morning.

[20:45] There's a lot of bad news. There's a lot of hard news. We have personal anxieties and worries and difficult circumstances we're dealing with right now. But we thank you that there's a louder voice.

There's a better story. And it's a story of your love and your grace and your hope. We might never have known that before, or we might have known it sometime in the past. But Lord, we pray that for all of us today, we would know your love, that you would open our hearts and make us receptive to it. We pray in the good name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.