

Sunday, January 20, 2013

## HOPE RISES FROM ONE FOUNDATION

Romans 1:1-7

“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” (Romans 15:13 ESV).

*Hope Rising* is the theme of our study and focus from the book of Romans.

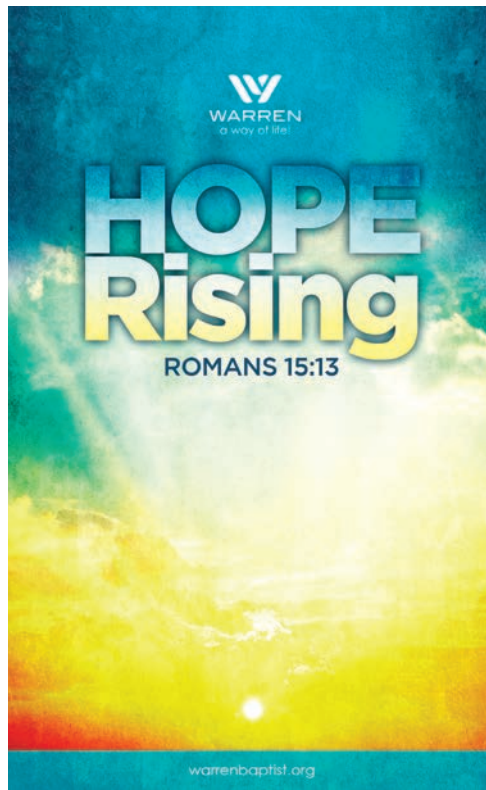
F.F. Bruce, a brilliant Bible scholar, said, “Time and again in the course of Christian history it [Romans] has liberated the minds of men, brought them back to an understanding of the essential Gospel of Christ, and started spiritual revolutions.”

I love the word, *revolution*. We are living in a day when we need a spiritual revolution. Throughout the course of Christian history, the spark and flame of any spiritual revolution began with an identification with and rediscovery of the message of the book of Romans. Let’s take a quick glimpse.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.) was a native of North Africa and a professor of rhetoric in Milan. On one occasion, Augustine confessed to a friend that he aspired to be a man of right standing and moral character. But in reality, he was off the mark and shackled as a slave to his darkest desires and worst impulses. Augustine—this very bright mind, yet brokenhearted man—began to weep as he continued his confession. In the distance, a child was playing and singing the line of a lyric over and over again, almost like a nursery rhyme: *tolle lege, tolle lege* (which means, *take up and read*).

As the thought lingered in Augustine’s mind, he picked up a manuscript, unrolled the scroll and read this portion of Scripture:

“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on



the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Romans 13:13-14 ESV).

After Augustine of Hippo read these words, he said, “No further would I read nor had I any need, instantly at the end of this sentence a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”

In that defining moment and with the word of God in his heart, Augustine (known in history as St. Augustine) began to frame much of the early teachings of church theology.

Let’s fast-forward to 1515. Here we find an Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther, professor of theology at the university in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther began teaching the book of Romans from November 1515, through September 1516. As he studied God’s Word, one verse proved to be a stumbling block for him, something Luther could not resolve in his heart concerning righteousness and the gospel:

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Romans 1:17 ESV).

Up to this time, Martin Luther’s understanding of righteousness had been synonymous with guilt, unworthiness, frustration and condemnation. He struggled, trying to use his own will and best effort to resolve his sin.

Luther said, “Night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy He justifies us by faith... Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise, the whole of Scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, it now began to fill me inexpressibly with a sweet love. The passage of Paul became to me the gateway to heaven.”

This gateway to Martin Luther’s heart became the gateway to the reformation of the church. Luther was used of God to shape the face of Europe, church history and even the destiny of many of us today.

John Calvin (1509-1564), another reformer from history, said, “When anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle [letter], he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”

In 1738, John Wesley, cofounder of the Methodist movement in the Church of England, came to the shores of the New World and landed in a place called Georgia. He tried to live in the New World, but the hardship of colonization and the issues surrounding people caused him to feel dejected, frustrated, and he ultimately went back to England. One evening he attended a gathering in Aldersgate Street where Wesley heard the preface to Martin Luther’s commentary on the book of Romans and verses from Romans.

John Wesley said, “My heart was strangely warmed... I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Methodism is not always associated with assurance of salvation and security of the believer, but Wesley had assurance and security because he understood the truth of the book of Romans.

All the people I have mentioned are considered “heavyweights” in both secular and Christian history, and every one of them was impacted by the power of the message of the book of Romans.

Frederick Louis Godet, author of an extensive commentary on the book of Romans, said, “The probability is that every great spiritual revival in the church will be connected as effect and cause with a deeper understanding of this book.”

I believe we are desperate for a spiritual revolution today, a revival that can only come when the hearts of God’s people are rightly rooted in the Word of God, hearts that are empowered and reshaped to change who we are and what we do in this day and age. For this reason, I believe we have hope that rises not from us—what we have or can do—but rises from the pages of Holy Scripture as we engage in this study of Romans.

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:1-7 ESV).

In these opening words, the Apostle Paul points the compass and sets the direction for everything he is going to

say, describe and address in the book of Romans. Paul puts it all together through one single phrase: “the gospel of God.” This phrase tells us that the sum total of the source, beginning, fulfillment, power and impact of the gospel is found in God.

How do we define the word, *gospel*? The etymology (background and root) is *euangelion*, which means *good word* or *good news*. The gospel is the good news of God—what God started, what God finishes, what God does. The book of Romans is about the gospel of God.

The Apostle Paul continues, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16 ESV).

The word, *power*, found in Romans 1:16, is the Greek work, *dunamis*, from which we get our word, *dynamite*. Let’s read it this way: “For I am not ashamed of the *good news of God*, for it is the *dynamite* of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16, paraphrased).

I am praying God will “blow up” our hearts through the power and message of this book. I am praying He will “blow our minds” as we begin to comprehend the truth of who He is and what He has done for us. I am praying He will re-organize and re-establish who we are and what we think as we begin to grasp the hope of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our hope is rooted in and rises from the gospel. The gospel is the foundation of our hope.

Our hope is not based on sentimentalism. It is more than wishful thinking or hopeful desire. Our hope provides a strong foundation for us to stand even when we face the hardest adversities. It is the anchor that keeps us on track to follow Christ even when we are tempted to compromise commitment or obedience.

Do you know the hope of the gospel? Are you strengthened and empowered to live from the hope rising in your heart? The gospel must become the

deepest part of your heart and faith. You will never grow beyond the power and hope of the gospel.

J.D. Greer, one of my younger contemporaries who is building an incredible church in the Raleigh-Durham area, wrote, “For many evangelicals, the gospel has functioned solely as the entry rite into Christianity; it is the prayer we pray to begin the relationship with Jesus, the diving board off which we jump into the pool of Christianity. After we get into the pool, we get into the real stuff of Christianity: mastering principles for a good marriage; learning rules and regulations on how to behave; and figuring out if Kirk Cameron will be left behind... The gospel, however, is not just the diving board off which we jump... it is the pool itself. It is not only the way we begin in Christ; it is the way we grow in Christ... As Tim Keller says, ‘It is not the ABC’s of Christianity but the A-Z; not the first step but the stairway of truths... all other Christian virtues flow out of it...’ Whatever spiritual dysfunction you have in your life, the cure is the GOSPEL.”

### **HOPE RISES FROM THE GOSPEL BECAUSE IT IS ESTABLISHED ON A PROMISE**

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...” (Romans 1:2 ESV).

God made a promise through the Jews and it was repeated and reiterated in the writings of the prophets. It was a promise that was even affirmed in the book of Revelation, “... before the foundation of the world...” (Revelation 13:8 ESV). It was a promise that would be fulfilled in us, whom God chose.

What was the promise? The Bible says, “... he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4 ESV). It is a promise that reflects the character of God.

God is a God Who makes and keeps promises. Why is the gospel good news? Because God keeps His promises!

We live in a broken world ethically, morally, emotionally, relationally, physically. Everyday we see expressions of hurt, heartache and brokenness.

Certainly we see broken promises in the realm of love and marriage. Is there any greater civil crisis or concern within our culture than the breakdown and breakup of homes and families? Broken promises of marriage, purity and fidelity have brought much pain and injury in our world.

Someone said, "I was just another promise you couldn't keep." Someone else said, "It gets harder to trust anyone when everyone you ever opened your heart to has let you down."

There are broken promises of government and leadership. You do know that politicians break their promises, don't you? Do you remember the 1988 presidential election campaign? A brilliant speech writer by the name of Peggy Noonan wrote a phrase that was repeated by presidential candidate George Bush: "Read my lips. No new taxes." And he was elected.

Four years later, Bush 41 was not re-elected. Do you know why? He broke a promise. And broken promises continue today in Washington, although we can be sure our taxes will be raised. Even though it *is* going to cost you more, the raising of revenue cannot fix what is wrong with America. America does not need greater revenue; America needs a revival that comes from God doing something in His church. The church needs a new heart and hope.

The medical and legislative communities have broken their promises, too. Every physician and healthcare worker ultimately ascribes to a Hippocratic Oath, a promise to protect and preserve life. However, this month marks the anniversary of one of the darkest days in American history: the 40th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. The Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision literally spilled abortion-on-demand into the heart and soul of this nation. It is incomprehensible that

we have laws to protect every unborn species threatened on this planet and yet, we legally protect the right to take children from their mothers' wombs.

A few days ago, a photo circulated of a precious baby girl who was about to be delivered by C-section. When the surgeon began that process, the baby's hand encircled the surgeon's finger. What a powerful picture from the womb of a hand reaching out for life and a future! And yet, within this nation, elective abortion is protected up until the third trimester. The question today is not, *is it life?*... or is it even *human life?* The question is, *what do we believe about life?*

Just because life is not seen doesn't mean it is unknown. By the way, the little girl's name—whose hand encircled the surgeon's finger—is Nevaeh, which is *heaven* spelled backwards. Every child is a gift from heaven, and we need to honor the promise of the protection of life. Passions rule, promises are unkept, abortion remains a right to be protected, and life is devalued as a nuisance to be discarded. Only God knows the impact of broken promises medically, ethically, legally, morally, and emotionally in the lives of people.

Certainly we have seen broken promises in the realm of athletics, performance and achievement. The Lance Armstrong story has been one of the most dominant news stories in these days. We learned that a man who had such an amazing peak performance did it by violating a spoken promise.

The good news is this: we have hope in a broken world! God is a Promise-Maker and Promise-Keeper. All the promises of God are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. What God promised in the Old Testament, He revealed in the New Testament through Jesus Christ. In fact, the Old Testament is quoted and repeated more in the book of Romans than any other book in the New Testament. There are 57 distinct references to the Old Testament writings because the Apostle Paul wanted everyone to know GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES.

J.B. Phillips said, "The revelation of God is an organic whole and it reaches its highest climax in the gospel. It was Paul's special calling to take the things of Christ latent in the Old Testament and explain them in light of Calvary."

### **HOPE RISES FROM THE GOSPEL BECAUSE IT IS VALIDATED IN A PERSON**

Do you have a *valid I.D.*? You'll need one if you go through security at an airport or high security event. A valid I.D. is usually a driver's license or passport, something that validates who you are or what you are doing. You can only pass through security with a valid I.D.

The Bible tells us the gospel of God was promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and the Person Who would validate it is a descendent from David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God in power by the resurrection.

We have hope in the gospel because the promise of God is fulfilled in Christ. Jesus Christ is the validating force of the gospel!

The Bible draws a specific parallel to the Son who would descend from David's throne according to the flesh. David was a king in Israel and one with whom God made a covenant. God promised that the Messiah and Deliverer would come through David's household, upon his throne. Therefore when you open the New Testament, Jesus Christ is presented as the descendent of David:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1 ESV).

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, also describes Jesus as the descendent of David:

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16 ESV).

Listen to the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness’” (Jeremiah 23:5-6 ESV).

This past Wednesday evening, several hundred of our students and their parents heard an incredible message about the fact that we are the branches tied to the vine of Christ. We are like “branch offices” of Christ everywhere we go.

Most of us have never been to our main bank building; we just go to the branch. But the branch represents the whole of the identity.

When the Bible speaks of Christ being a branch, it is saying that God brought a “branch office” of Himself to earth when Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Jesus brought God to us that we might know the Father. Jesus then came to live in us that we might extend the life and hope of the Father to others.

How can you be made righteous? Only by God’s righteous Branch whose name is Jesus. Jesus validates the gospel. Jesus not only came to sit on the throne of David; Jesus is Lord because He rose from the dead.

“The world may deny Him His throne rights as the seed of David during this age, but every believer is duty bound to own Him as both Lord and Christ.” —J.B. Phillips

It is amazing how many people are willing, and even eager, in the name of freedom to be slaves to anyone and anything except Jesus Christ. And yet, it is only when people come to Jesus Christ, put their trust in Him and become His slaves that they experience true freedom in life.

**HOPE RISES FROM THE GOSPEL  
BECAUSE IT IS  
AUTHENTICATED WITH POWER**

What is the authenticating power of the Gospel? The Apostle Paul makes it very clear: “...promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:2-4 ESV).

The resurrection of Christ is the fundamental, foundational truth of the entire Christian faith.

“The resurrection is not merely important to the historic Christian faith; without it, there would be no Christianity. It is the singular doctrine that elevates Christianity above all other world religions.” —Adrian Rogers

Every religion of the world has a teacher, moral standard-bearer, or philosopher—maybe even a martyr. But in the Christian faith, Jesus is the Savior Who died on the cross, was buried and rose again that we might know the power of hope rising in His name. The Christian faith is all about the resurrection!

There is no hope in crucifixion; it is only in the resurrection. Since Christ rose from the dead, He is more than a martyr; He is the Savior. If there is no resurrection, there is no help, hope, change, power or destiny. Since Jesus Christ has risen as Scripture declares, we have hope! We *can* be made righteous in Christ! We, who are unrighteous, sinful, defiled and weak, *can* be released from the penalty of sin. Why? Because Jesus bore *our* sins on the cross and rose from the dead.

Not only are we released from the penalty of sin, we live with the hope that one day, we will be delivered from the power of sin day-by-day because His spirit now lives in us. When we believe on the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. We have a power that is more than the power of the world around us. And one day, we will be taken and delivered from the presence of sin.

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus’ Name.  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.  
—Edward Mote

If your hope is built on any foundation other than the gospel of God, it will sink.

This book of Romans is a very comprehensive and technical book. It can be overwhelming in its structure and superstructure. If all you hear are abstract principles, instructional precepts and foundational moral tenets, you have missed the purpose of this book. The book of Romans is about Jesus because Jesus is the gospel of God! When you see Christ—the fullness of Who He is and what He has done—you discover the power of the gospel of God in life.

**Hope rises**  
not from my performance,  
but from  
**God’s provision** through  
**Christ’s payment** and the  
**Spirit’s power** at work in me!

I want you to know, experience and live in light of that hope.

O long and dark the stairs I trod;  
With trembling feet to find my God  
Gaining a foothold, bit by bit,  
Then slipping back and losing it.

Never progressing, striving still  
With weakening grasp and faltering will,  
Bleeding to climb to God, while He  
Serenely smiled, not noting me.

Then came a certain time when I  
Loosened my hold and fell thereby;  
Down to the lowest step my fall,  
As if I had not climbed at all.

Now when I lay despairing there,  
Listen, a footfall on the stair,  
On that same stair where I afraid,  
Faltered and fell and lay dismayed.

And lo, when hope had ceased to be,  
My God came down the stairs to me!  
—Anonymous

We don't just need reform, resolve, renewal of will or recasting of vision. We need a rescue! There is only One who can rescue us; it is the Savior, Jesus Christ!

*Father, You and You alone see the hearts of those in front of me today. I pray this would be a moment where You have been preparing the hearts of those who have experienced the bitterness of broken promises, those who have lived with a sense of need, of rescue. I pray this would be the time, place and moment when they will see and know what Christ has done and accomplished in the good news we share. We know that in and of ourselves there is nothing good. We know we cannot fix what is wrong within us. Lord, You sent Your Son that He might take our place in suffering and provide for us His place and forgiveness in righteousness and in glory. I pray that reality will be known in this place today and You will rescue people from broken promises. I pray You will rescue broken marriages, broken hearts and broken hopes in this hour because of the gospel of God that we have and share today in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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David H. McKinley is Pastor-Teacher of Warren Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia. This message has been edited for print purposes. You may listen or watch this message in its entirety by visiting [warrenbaptist.org](http://warrenbaptist.org).

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