

Hope-filled Love

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Preacher: Chris Thornton

[0 : 00] Good morning. The scripture reading this morning comes from Romans chapter 12. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible.

Starting in verse 1 we read, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Then in verse 9 we read, Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hope fast to what is good.

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal.

[1 : 18] Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. This is the word of God.

Amen. Thank you so much, Angeline. Welcome again. My name is Chris, if you don't know me. And if you're here for the baptism as well, you're just super welcome. Really, really excited that you can join us this morning.

Let me just pray for us as we begin to look into God's word. Father, thank you that whatever week we've had, wherever we come from, however our circumstances, you are still God.

Lord, I pray that you're the one who loves us. And you're the one who is with us. And you're the one who is faithful. And you're the one who never lets us go.

[2 : 25] And Lord, I pray that this morning you would speak to us. I pray, Lord, even as we celebrate the baptism later, we would just remember your goodness. And the fact that you are the one who does immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

Lord, fill our hearts with a real deep hope in you. So that we can be a people who don't just say the right things, but live with a real deep confidence in the mercies of God in our lives.

We pray this morning you'd open our ears to hear your word. I pray that you would just speak through me, but I pray your spirit would take your word and just bury it into our hearts, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Great. The Washington Post, they had an article a few years ago which headline was, Too Many Celebrities, Not Enough Heroes.

And as I read the article, Fiona was just talking to me this week, telling me about in Hong Kong there is this new sensational boy band called Mirror.

[3 : 36] Does anyone know Mirror? Okay, there's a few fans out here. Well, you can find out from them. And she was telling me that many husbands have started complaining that they've lost their wives to infatuation with members of this boy band.

This is what you might call celebrity love. It's a kind of love which is based on appearances. It's based on feelings and attractions.

But it's superficial. You don't actually know what they're like. It's a mirage. It's celebrity love. But then there is another kind of love which I like to call heroic love.

It's the kind of love where heroes are willing to lay down their lives for others in the hard realities of life. They're ordinary, not glamorous.

They're sacrificial, not self-focused. They're purpose-driven, not feeling-driven. You know, it's the kind of love of parents for their children, not fans for their celebrities.

[4 : 44] And the book of Romans, which we've been going through over the last few weeks, and Paul, the apostle who's been writing it, has been painting this picture of Jesus as the ultimate heroic lover.

However, his sacrificial love for us goes beyond all other heroes that we might have. While we were not just friends of God, but even enemies of God, he came and died for us, sacrificing his life for us. To bring us back, to reconcile us into the relationship we were always made for with the creator God. And to draw us into his family. And to bring us to be part of a cosmic redemption story that God is writing, even right now.

And all of this, Paul has been saying, we receive by faith. It's not by being religious. It's not by being moral. It's a gift of grace to us.

It's by the mercies of God. And Paul has then said, in the light of this, his family, the church, in the light of his mercies and empowered by his mercies, are to live and to reflect that same love, to be a community, not of celebrity love, but of heroic love like Jesus' love.

[6 : 03] A love that doesn't just look nice on the outside, but is genuine, even in, excuse me, genuine in whatever circumstances we go through.

It's a heroic love like Jesus. And last week, we looked, we began to see how Paul starts in verse 9, he says, let love be genuine. And then he goes through and tells us what this love begins to look like.

It's a love that hates evil. It loves good. It's a love that is honoring other people before ourselves. It's a love that is fervent, self-forgetful, serving God in every area of our lives.

But as you think about those things that he's been telling us in verses 9 through to 11, you can actually do a lot of those things when life's going okay, when the seas are calm.

But today's passage, where we're going to look particularly at verses 12 and 13, is about how do you love when life gets tough, when the waves are crashing against the boat of your life.

[7 : 07] How do you be in a community of ordinary heroic love at that point? And so I'm going to go through two points, which are basically the two verses that we're going to look at.

The first point is hope in turbulence. And the second is hope that fuels love. So let's look at hope in turbulence.

And just have your bulletin looking at those two particular verses. So verse 9 has said, let love be genuine. And now in verse 12, he tells you another way that love can be genuine.

He says, And the middle command of that, being patient in tribulation, tells you that the context for this is painful, it's messy, and the kind of love that we're to show, is not just when everything's going well.

Because the word tribulation in scripture actually has a lot of different meanings of the way different kinds of suffering can come. It can mean persecution. It can mean financial hardship.

[8 : 20] It can mean heartache at the decisions of other people. It can mean even childbirth. So it can mean all kinds of suffering that we experience in this world. And when he says be patient, be patient, that's actually the word for to endure.

It means, you know, it's kind of like the image of a speaker who's speaking, and they're just getting heckled, and people throwing things at them, and they just keep going in spite of everything being thrown at them.

They continue, and they just keep going, no matter how many tomatoes are thrown at them. They endure. They persevere. They continue. It's what, you know, 1 Corinthians tells us, love perseveres.

It doesn't back down when the going gets tough. It keeps to its commitments and its promises. But how does it do that? Well, this is where the first and the last of that trio of commands shows us.

So the first one is rejoice in hope, and I'm going to spend a bit more time on this one. Because I don't know what you think about the word hope, but hope is actually vital for life.

[9 : 34] Hope is actually a desire for heaven. I don't know if you realize that, because hope is a desire for a better world, for a better life, for a better future.

That's what hope is. Hope is what gets you out of bed in the morning, thinking that you could be different, your life could be different, or you can make a difference in the world in some way.

You know, I hoped that England would win last week, so I got up at 3 a.m. I never do that. I am still hoping that that might happen in the future.

But when people lose hope, like England supporters often do, or like actually a lot of young people in Hong Kong have, right, what happens is you give up.

You get depressed. You lose the joy of life when you have no hope. And so secular hope, the hope out there, is actually looking for heaven on earth now.

[10:41] You're looking for it in promotion, or in early retirement, or in a comfortable life, or in a great body. That's why you go to the gym all the time. But Christian hope is actually different from all of that.

So let me explore what Christian hope is. Romans 5 says, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. That's an amazing statement. That's a statement that should get Christians out of bed every morning with a sense of purpose. Because Christian hope is that you and I were made for a personal relationship with the glorious, majestic creator of the universe.

And every believer who puts their trust in him, you can experience that relationship even right now with him.

But right now, if you're a Christian, you know that a relationship with God is still a little bit like being on Zoom. It's real, but there's something not quite all there.

[11:50] Right? There's something missing. But the hope of the glory of God is one day, that even though we see glimpses of his glory, though we experience the realness of his relationship right now, one day, you won't be on Zoom with him, you'll see him face to face.

In his majestic beauty and majesty. I mean, just look at the sunset, look at the stars, and those are just a glimpse of the majesty of who he is.

And scripture says, when you see the glory of God, then you and I will be home. Because he is actually the place where every desire and every longing that you have ever had is ultimately satisfied.

Because he and we were made for him. We have hope that we will see the glory of God. But not only that, Paul also says, don't we all know deep down that there's something in us that's not what we should be?

Right? We know that we're not all that we want to be. And we know that this world is not all that it should be. And the hope of the glory of God is like the Japanese art of kintsugi.

[13:02] Do you know kintsugi? Well, you know, where they take this broken pottery and what they do, they put it together with gold. You've got a picture of it. I think there's a picture here.

And they put it together with gold. So actually what gets happened is the brokenness gets transformed into this glorious masterpiece. And so what God is saying, he will not only transform our broken lives from shame into glory so that we reflect his loving, perfect kindness and graciousness, but this world will also be freed from all the stuff you see on the news of the suffering, of the injustice, of the exploitation, of the pain.

And some of you feel that pain today. And he says, there will be a time where there will be no more tears. There will be no more pain because we will be home with the one who created us.

Heaven on earth. We have a hope in a good God who regrets glory out of brokenness. That is what Christian hope is. And you might say, well, I hope that's true.

But you know when we say I hope, generally that's just kind of a wish, right? It's like, I hope England will win. Like, good chance. It's not a certainty. But when the Bible talks about hope, it's saying three things.

[14:30] First thing it's saying, hope is certain for Christians. Romans tells us, hope does not disappoint us because God's poured his love into our hearts.

You know, every hope you have placed in this world can be taken away from you. But Christian hope is a hope outside of this world. And it's in the safe hands of God. And do you know what? God's never let go. God can never let you down. It cannot be taken away by COVID or an economic crisis because God's bigger than all of that. And so it's a bit like this.

You know, secular hope is like, did you see those flights to nowhere during COVID? Right? Where basically there is no destination.

The whole purpose of the flight is to get on the flight and just enjoy the ride and then come back down again. Okay? Now imagine if you've bought business class tickets. It's been a hard few months.

[15:29] You want to relax. You want to watch some movies. Just get away from it all. Okay? Good idea. So you take off. Everything's great. You start watching your favorite movie.

You're just getting to the really good scene and then the entertainment system stops. Freezes. And you're like, oh my goodness me. You're mad. And you're like, oh, it's just that good scene.

But then as you try and desperately try and get someone to fix the issue and it takes some time because they're busy with everybody else but then after 30 minutes of frustration and they just tell

you sorry, it's not working you go, okay.

Let me try and get some sleep. I need a bit of rest. So you just start nodding off and then turbulence hits and it's really bad turbulence.

Have you seen that turbulence? You, where everyone around you, you know when you've been in turbulence and it's like this and it goes on not just for one minute but it's two minutes, five minutes, ten minutes and everyone's panicking. Everyone thinks the plane's going to go down.

[16:31] That's what actually a secular hope is like because in a flight to nowhere all your hopes, whatever you're putting your life on can be taken away from you in one instance of tribulation.

Money, jobs, relationships, it's all uncertain. But Christian hope is different. It's a different flight. It's a flight with a destination.

You know, like the Maldives. It's actually a destination to the glory of God. And if everything's smooth in life, we enjoy the flight. We enjoy the blessings God gives us.

But if turbulence hits, it's unpleasant. We don't kind of love the turbulence but it doesn't crush us because our hope isn't on the flight, it's in the destination.

You see, nothing can take away this hope because the fact that Jesus died and rose again from the dead means for Christians the Christian plane will not crash.

[17:33] Then there's one who's waiting for us at the airport who's going to welcome us. It's our lover and our saviour, Jesus Christ. The one who's sacrificed his entire life for us.

And whether the flight is smooth or whether the flight is tough, all of it is actually still getting you towards the destination. You know, I know from personal experience in the face of death, there's no greater certainty than a resurrected saviour who you know has already gone before you and is waiting for you.

That's Christian hope. It's certain. But Christian hope is not just certain, it's also transformational. Because what does Paul say? He says, we rejoice in hope.

Now just think about how you rejoice in a baby. We had one four months ago. And so what happens is you spend time, you gaze at your child in the cot kind of longingly going, wow, isn't she amazing? You show everybody your baby and then other people say, oh, isn't she lovely? And you do all of that and you post a gazillion photos on Instagram and Facebook. You talk about her all the time to everyone.

[18:44] You go, oh, she farted today. It was amazing. You do all of these kind of things. You rejoice in your baby. How do you rejoice in hope?

Well, you rehearse and you gaze and you talk about the hope you have to yourself and in community we remind each other of that. Because if drawing close to Jesus and being transformed to be like him is our hope, then we know that actually the trials and the turbulence we go through right now are actually the refining fire which is actually drawing us and shaping us towards that goal even today.

You know, I have a stomach condition which reoccurs from time to time. And you know when you just feel rough, you don't feel like rejoicing at all, do you? And you actually feel like having a pity party.

Oh, woe is me. But rejoicing in hope means right at those moments what God is trying to teach me and is what God wants to teach all of us who really know what it is to go through turbulence in these times is that we load our gospel shotgun with the promises of God.

That right now I have Christ in me the hope of glory. That I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. That he is renewing me and transforming me from one degree of glory to another right now in this moment.

[20:08] And as I rehearse that scripture and other people in the community remind me of the hope that we have. Do you know what happens? Immediately, not a lot.

But actually as I battle and I wrestle hope rises and I discover God in new ways that I never thought were possible. And he gives me the strength to persevere in the midst of them.

And my soul actually finds joy even in those hard moments because there is a purpose and I have a certain hope at that moment and he is beginning to transform me and transform us right at that place towards the hope that he has for us.

You see, hope is not just certain. Hope is also transformational. But the third thing that Christian hope is, it's also personal.

And because though it's not, it's a certain destination, Paul actually says be constant in prayer. You know, prayer is communicating with God.

[21 : 24] Constant means stubbornly, persistently, in a disciplined way, carrying on and doing it. You know, the early disciples met constantly in the temple in the book of Acts.

It's a regular, habitual discipline. Like talking to your wife, actually. For a healthy relationship, communication needs to be constant, right?

Regular habit. But here's the point. In turbulence, if your hope is getting the entertainment system of your life fixed and working, you'll get stressed just trying to get it all to work.

You'll get frustrated. When all along, there's someone who's sitting next to you on the flight, but he's not just an ordinary passenger. He's God himself.

He's the one who is the pilot of the plane, but he's also the one who's owned and designed the aircraft. And he's the one who created the laws of thermodynamics.

[22 : 27] and he's the one who's holding up the plane of your life right now. And if he is with you, if he is with you, then that means you don't just have an abstract, distant hope somewhere over there.

You have a present place where you can run. You have a place where you can cry. You have a place where you can find refuge and strength no matter how hard it is for you, even right now. because he is not abstract. He is a person, Jesus Christ, with you. You see, constant prayer is an obligation for Christians just like breathing is an obligation for human beings.

You see, in the turbulence, we don't just need a solution. We need a person to cling to. And in prayer, what we do is we turn to Jesus and we remember, he says, I'm with you always.

I'll get you to the destination. I've got this. I don't know what you're going through right now, but some of you need to hear him saying, run to me because I want you to experience the fact that I have got your situation right now.

[23 : 46] You can trust me. because he knows how the plane works even when we have no idea. He says, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

And by the way, if you are struggling right now, don't go it alone. Come and speak to one of us, myself, a CG member, because we're to be a community who walks on this road together.

So what does that all have to do with love, this verse 12? Well, I want to move on to verse 13, which is the second point, which is hope fuels love.

You see, when your hope is in now, you will become stressed and frustrated with the turbulence of life. you'll become anxious, because if everything is about now, man, that's a lot of pressure on. But can anyone tell me, has anyone who's been really stressed ever been more loving when you're stressed? Anyone? I don't think so.

[25 : 03] Because what happens when we're stressed, we tend to turn inwards, we tend to try and preserve ourselves. Some of us do that by escaping into alcohol or binge-watching Netflix.

We just try and cope with the situation. Others of us keep calm and carry on. And then you look around at everybody else who's worrying, whether it's about COVID or other things, and you go, why are they all worrying?

Why are they all so weak and emotional about these things? You should be like me. And you have very little compassion on other people who are struggling. doing. But when you've got a hope beyond the flight, when the turbulence hits and the Spirit reminds you to turn in prayer to your all-powerful Savior by your side, remind yourself of the scripture promises of hope, and you find that over time he brings peace and a joy into your heart, then what happens is that hope-filled joy begins to take your eyes off yourself.

And you start looking around and you see the other passengers around and you see their needs and you see their anxieties and their worries, not just your own. And Paul says this, with hope, what you can start to do is you can start to contribute to the needs of the saints.

You see, contribute doesn't just mean, okay, throw in some money into the offering and then go back to your own problems. The word contribute, actually, it's the word fellowship, which means to share life with.

[26 : 36] He says, share life with the saints. That means other believers in church. It means entering into partnership with their struggles so their burden becomes your burden.

You feel their struggles, not just your own. And I've been so encouraged, because in Watermark, I know there are families who are struggling with young kids, and there are CG members, you've just stepped up, you're providing meals, you're providing babysitting, you're providing toys, all kinds of

things.

I know that there are families here who are reaching out to singles who are struggling with loneliness, and you're inviting them in to spend meals so that they can experience family life in this difficult season.

Hope opens you up to love other people, and I see that in our community. But you know, you will only see the needs of others when you're actually investing in relationships with people.

Do you know, that's why we encourage everyone in Watermark to get into CGs, or if you're in a stage of life as a family, to get into family groups where you can actually begin to walk with one another, and when you do that, you'll begin to see the needs of other people.

[27 : 48] So my question is, do you see the needs of people in your CG? Do you see the needs of people in Watermark around you? Or, and here's the challenge, are you wrapped up with all of your own problems that you can't see beyond them?

Because if that's the case, that may be an indication to you that your hope is in the flight rather than in the destination. And God may be calling you, come back to me and place your hope in me, and let me free you to see others around you.

But you see, it's not just, he says, hope opens you to see the church community around. He then says it opens you to see the community outside the church too.

Because he says next, seek to show hospitality. And again, the word hospitality doesn't mean dinner parties or fine dining. The word literally means in Greek, love for strangers.

Love for strangers. And he says, pursue, seek, pursue, actively, pursue loving strangers.

[29 : 01] Not just kind of wait till some show up. No, actually be looking for opportunities where you can open up your life, your home, your heart, not just for the people in the church community, but also for those outside who can experience the love of Christ through us.

That's actually what, you know, some of you did. Who went on loving the city? Okay, a few of you did. That's why we want to call people to see the city, the loving the city.

Some of us went out to pour tea for refuse collectors and just get to know them. Some of us are with the Young Lives, teen ministry that Oscar mentioned, you know, we're befriending vulnerable mothers.

I know there's a couple of CGs here who are tutoring refugee kids. And God is calling us as we have this hope that we don't have to cling to our life right now, but we can see other people.

You know, one of the things I've realized being in Hong Kong, and my wife has also shared this with me about her life, that growing up, many of us are taught to be very private.

[30 : 08] We're taught to be very suspicious of strangers and people you don't know. You know, they could do things. You can be dangerous. And one of the things that I've seen, both with people here in Watermark, but also with my wife as well, is that as the gospel has grown and shaped and worked in their life, what it's done, it's actually opened them up to be less fearful and to open up their lives.

I've seen opening up our home for refugees, troubled kids. I've seen people just serving the homeless who a million, like in their childhood, they would never have done it. Why? Because the hope of the gospel changes you to go, I don't have to cling to my privacy right now.

I don't have to cling to my comfort right now because my hope is not in right now, because I can be messy right now and it's okay. I can be a little bit risky right now because actually God's got me and he's my security and he's my protection.

Here's a challenge from Rosaria Butterfield. She says this, Christians who have too much are the ones prohibited from practicing hospitality.

They have so many cluttered idols that they can give nothing at all. For this reason, it's often the well-heeled and rich who are known for their lack of hospitality and the meager and even poor who are known for their plentiful hospitality.

[31 : 34] So Christian, kill your idols. I was really challenged by that. Really challenged by that. Because you know, as Watermark, we're not the poorest of the poor.

people who want to do in our lives and in our church is that in an anxious world, in an anxious city, that as Christian hope gets hold of us into our hearts, it begins to change us into this community which is willing to sacrifice our in-flight comforts and the desires that we have to spend time with the Filipino community on a Sunday afternoon.

For those who can afford it, renting larger properties so that you can host people more. And I know many of you do this. People from different backgrounds. It means sacrificing your free time to be willing to accompany a teen mom to a hospital appointment.

It looks like inviting the receptionist or a colleague in your workplace, even when you're busy out for lunch, or taking the time to pray and talk with the security guard that you have.

You see, as a community, God wants us to be known as people who are lovers of strangers. Not because we do it in our own strength, but because we know the mercies of God to us.

[32 : 55] Because we know that Christ was the most hospitable person ever. You know, didn't he eat and drink with the despised, with the outcast, with the shamed, but also with the religious hypocrites like the Pharisees?

He eats and drinks with those who feel your brokenness the most. For those of us who need a hope beyond ourselves. And he opens his arms, welcoming people like you and me to his table to eat with him, the king of all creation, without condemnation, without judgment, to come home to be with him.

And if you're not a Christian today, Jesus is pursuing strangers like you. And he's calling you today not just to keep the door shut and bolted on the inside, but as he knocks on the door of your heart, he's saying, will you open up your heart to me?

Don't be so private, don't be so self-reliant that the king of kings can't enter and show you what it really means to have hope. Will you shut out the pilot of your life because you want to pilot your own life?

You know, that's the way to a plane crash. Will you pray today, Jesus, if you are who you say you are, then I want you to come into my life.

[34 : 33] I want to find this hope in you. Pilot my life. I want a relationship with you. That's the offer today. Will you take it? And if you are a Christian, do you know, in our city, the most persuasive argument for the truth of the gospel is not a great sermon.

It's not a great intellectual conversation, though those things are good. It's a community of hope-fulfilled, heroic love. Who, because of the mercies of Jesus, we learn to kill our idols, whether it's of comfort, privacy, self-reliance, whatever they are.

And in the midst of tribulation, we learn how to rejoice in the hope that we have. We learn how to be patient and just keep going constantly in prayer, contributing and sharing our lives with the needs of those in our church community, opening our hopes, opening our homes and our hearts and our lives to those around us, and setting our sights on Christ, the hope of glory.

Let me pray. I want you just to think where you are up to right now with Jesus.

And some of us need to actually just rejoice again in the hope that we have in Christ. Some of us, we've forgotten. We haven't gazed on Christ recently.

[36 : 13] We've gazed on our problems. But some of you just need to come and thank him for who he is and what he's done and where he's taking us. Some of us need to repent that actually we're putting our hope in so many other things.

And Jesus calls you to his table to find hope in him. And some of us, God is calling you to actually take a step of faith, to reach out to someone, to pray for someone, to look beyond yourself and let Jesus work in your heart.

So as the band comes up and we're going to sing our next song, just take a few seconds to just pray wherever you're up to with God. Some of us need, in the struggles that we're going through, to just cling to Jesus and just to pray to him right now.

He's with you. He's with you. Father, we just want to thank you. that with you there's a hope that is utterly, utterly unshakable.

Thank you that your resurrection means that we are never left alone. That you walk with us. Teach us to love because we have a true hope in you.

[37 : 40] In Jesus' name. Amen.