

ROMANS 8:18-27
EAGER EXPECTATION

What's going to happen tomorrow? Do you know what you will do tomorrow? What do you hope will happen? Tomorrow? Next week? Next month? Next year? There are certain things about tomorrow that are predictable: we know that on Monday some things happen; we know that on Monday we will be looking after our grandson; you know that you go to work because it is Monday, or shopping, or some such; we prepare for doing these things because it is Monday. But a certain amount is also unpredictable: we're not sure what we will do with Daniel because it depends on the weather; you may not know what tasks will be required of you at work, how will work be – it depends on the frame of mind your boss is in! Unexpected things happen! We live with that kind of unpredictability; it is part and parcel of life; some find that unpredictability discomfoting!

That is where hope comes in. Hope is one of these words that we use in a few different ways: we say "I hope to go to the zoo tomorrow..." but there is an in-built uncertainty because something may come along to derail that plan. "I hope..." takes place of "I will..."; it is not as set, not as certain; there is something doubtful about it; it is a plan but it may not happen. I put "hope" into Google and came up with couple of things: "HopeUK works with communities throughout the UK to prevent drug and alcohol-related harm to children and young people." Here is an organisation with hope in its title, trying to give young people a positive future; to a previous generation was known as the Band of Hope! HopeUK is planning for the future, trying to equip children and young people to cope with life's pressures and difficulties. The other was a quote from Aristotle: "Hope is a waking dream." I'm not sure whether I like that or not; I'll leave you to mull it over and we'll come back to it later.

"Hope" is a key Bible word. Faith, hope, love – three great, key Bible qualities, three things without which we simply cannot do! The problem for us in understanding 'hope' is that the Bible uses "hope" in a slightly different way from the way in which we normally use it. Some things are the same: hope looks to the future, hope tells us about what will happen tomorrow, or at some time in the future; hope tells us that some things are yet to be and that there is a great future for us to which we look forward. At least one thing is different: the hope of the Bible is "*sure and certain*"; there is nothing uncertain about this hope; it will happen. We may not know the details of how it will happen or when, but the bible is certain that the hope about which it writes will take place. You can trust this hope for three reasons: 1. God is faithful and keeps His promises; 2. Jesus has died and is raised; 3. the Spirit lives in us and He is deposit that guarantees full payment!

Romans 8 is full of hope; it is one of the most confident chapters in all the bible! We have seen some of that already: "*There is...*" (8:1) Since Jesus has died and is raised "*there is...*" We are free, forgiven, and need have no fear anymore; we are free to be ourselves and have no need to be afraid of failure or condemnation. This legal status is ours because Jesus died and was raised. More: "*those who... since we...*" (8:14,17) we are children with God as our Father; we are heirs of glory along with Jesus; all that Jesus will inherit in the kingdom of God because of His royalty, we will share because of the grace of God. We are family because Jesus died and was raised. "Be confident; this is who we really are! We have this now; enjoy it!" We walk with a spring in our step, full of confidence in who we are and what God has done for us. It doesn't get any better than this! Or does it...?

"*I consider...*" (8:18) At the end of last week's sermon, we spoke about being heirs and sharing Jesus' glory and being the children of God and that is all about our status; this is

what God has decided we should be and we have that now. Today we move to a whole new level! There is something yet to be revealed; there is something still hidden that will be revealed “in us”. Something has already happened for us and we rejoice in being the children of God; but there is something that is still to happen to us. Here is our sure and certain hope! Paul paints a picture of two parts, a contrast: “here is what life is like now; here is what life will be like in a day still to come.” We know part one; we hope for the other. We know the present reality; we have a sure and certain hope of a new reality, that is full of glory.

“Groaning” is a wonderfully evocative word; the present reality is summed up by this word. It gives a feeling of sighing, complaining, and longing. First, Paul pictures creation groaning: “*the creation...*” (8:19) The whole of creation is groaning, waiting for something new to happen. Scientists will tell you that the universe is dying; by their estimate it might take two to three billion years, but it is slowly dying. Paul describes creation that is frustrated, that is “in bondage to decay”, creation that is in pain. Creation is groaning, waiting, longing for something new to happen and that something new will happen to creation when something new happens to us. Secondly, we are groaning: in Romans 7 Paul has been looking at himself and how he knows what is good, but can never quite manage to get it right every time; he ends the chapter with a groan: “What a...” (7:24) Sin still lives in us; we are weak spiritually; we know what it is to suffer, to become ill or weak, to struggle in life; we make mistakes, we have bad habits that we struggle to break, we fall out with other people; we groan. We try to pray, but we can’t always get the words and so our prayers become like groans, though Spirit helps us. There is a deep frustration in us and we long to be completely free from all that drags us down. We groan! Creation groans!

“*I consider...*” (8:18) There is something still to be revealed, that is still hidden that one day will be seen; the glory that belongs to Jesus and of which we are heirs, will be revealed in us. Now we are striving to become like Jesus; one day we will be completely like Him, perfect, glorious human beings. “*We...*” (8:23) We are already adopted as children, but there is a time coming when we will be completely like Jesus, perfect, complete, whole human beings; all sin will be wiped away and we will be glorious and all creation will see and know that we are the children of God. This will be our glorious freedom! When we die, we go to be with Jesus; Jesus has promised that He will come again and make everything new – somewhere in all of that, this is our sure and certain hope; we will see Jesus as He is and we will be perfectly and completely like Him, children bearing the Father’s glory totally, completely, fully, perfectly. When that happens to us, the whole creation will be made new, will be set free.

Isaiah painted a picture of a whole new world in chapter 65 of his prophecy. He does, in his way, exactly what Paul has been doing in his theological language of Romans 8. He paints a picture of a new world, a new creation and he rejoices in that hope. It is a picture of life and peace, of joy and delight; all that causes people to cry will have no place there; there will be no sickness, no death, no pain and suffering. People are groaning with injustice: they build houses, but other people live in them; that groaning will be swept away and people will be at peace with themselves, with the world and with God; they will be a people greatly blessed by God. The whole of creation will live in peace and harmony; nothing will be allowed to disturb that peace and harmony. If you want a New Testament version of that vision of the future world, then look at the last 2 chapters of the Bible and you will see much the same language, the same pictures, the same hope.

What are we to do with this hope? First of all, we are to enjoy it! There is so much in our world that causes us to despair that this kind of light and hope does us the power of good. We see the sufferings of the world and our sufferings; we are all too aware of them at times: war in Syria, famine in Africa, pain in our bodies, falling out with our best friend; these sufferings never seem to end and our prayers seem to go unanswered. No matter how hard we try, there is a spirit of despair that grips our hearts at times, and there seems to be no end; life is a circle that has no beginning and no end and we just seem to go round the loop over and over again. So to counter all of that, enjoy this hope. Life is not a circle; God is working out His plan and purpose for our life and the world and the universe and this hope is at heart of that purpose. We will see Jesus; we will be with Him; we will share His glory and be perfect, complete people. See that hope and enjoy it; look forward to it; it is sure and certain because it is based on the promises of God. Enjoy this hope; let it counter despair; hold on to the day coming when everything will be new, including you and me.

Secondly, we wait patiently for this hope. Hope is something we don't yet have; we look forward to it. There is always the temptation to throw it all away, to give up the faith and hope that we talk about because faith is too hard. Patience is hard when life is a struggle; but patience is fuelled by the certainty of our hope. Especially when life makes us want to complain and be angry, wait patiently.

Thirdly, we work out its principles here and now! "Preacher, this is just pie-in-sky-nonsense!" There is the criticism that Christians have lived with our heads in the clouds, seeing this hope and so we haven't cared about this world - "This world is not my home; I'm just passing thru" according to the old gospel song. The criticism is that Christians have done nothing about the world's problems because ultimate glory is all that has been on our minds. This is what worries me about Aristotle's idea that "hope is a waking dream" – it is as if we are sleepwalking through life. We need to turn that hope into work and energy in our world. We see a day coming when there will be no more war: so we campaign for peace. We long for a day coming when famine will be ended – we work in our world to make sure that everyone has enough to eat. We see a world where everyone will live happily together – we work to be rid of injustice and oppression in our world. We hope that one day we will be like Jesus, complete – we work now to become more and more like Jesus in the kind of people that we are in our world. We see people in despair, who have no hope – we work to tell people about Jesus, His death and rising again and what that means and the hope Jesus gives; we try to change their lives. This hope is not excuse to sit back and do nothing, to be lazy: in the first century, Christians had the hope that Christ would come back soon, that His coming was imminent and so some gave up working, they gave up everyday life to sit back, to wait and look for Jesus. That is not what hope is meant to do; hope is meant to spur us on to love and good deeds in the kingdom of God.

I hope that you have a good day tomorrow, whatever you do. I hope that your good plans for the future bring you all the happiness that you want. I hope that.. Well, I can hope all that I like; there is not much that I can do about some of that! But, the Bible hope is sure and certain; the thing about that hope is "we don't have it yet". That's what makes it hope; it is yet to be; it is for the future; it is still to be revealed in us. God has promised; Jesus has died and is raised; the Spirit lives in us as the guarantee – three great reasons for trusting this hope; it will happen; we will be perfect, complete people; there will be a new world, a new heaven and a new earth; God is working out His purpose and the whole earth will be filled with His glory. Take His word for it!