

"Hush Child, God Ain't Dead"

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North East United Methodist Church

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Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

-Romans 15:13, NASB

James DeLoach, associate pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Houston, tells the following story...

I am not a connoisseur of great art, but from time to time a painting or picture will really speak a clear, strong message to me. Some time ago I saw a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney...the charred debris of what had been that family's sole possession. In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather-looking man dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology and philosophy of life. Those words were, "Hush child, God ain't dead!"

That vivid picture of that burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words "God ain't dead" keep returning to my mind. Instead of it being a reminder of the despair of life, it has come to be a reminder of hope!

I need reminders that there is hope in this world. In the midst of all of life's troubles and failures, I need mental pictures to remind me that all is not lost as long as God is alive and in control of His world.

"Hush child, God ain't dead."

In his letter to the Romans, in the verses leading up to verse 13, Paul is writing to a community of believers made up of both Jews and Gentiles (pagans). They are together because they have heard the Gospel message. They have heard how God, through Christ, fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament...how God, through Christ, kept His promise voiced through the prophet Isaiah, *"There shall come the root of Jesse, and He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles hope"*...They have heard how God, through Christ, has included not only the Jews but also the Gentiles in His family...God's original plan to include both Jews and Gentiles in one elect people, God's adopted children, has come to fruition.

Paul wants people to understand that Jesus came into the world to save ALL; no one is excluded from His invitation, from His love.

This truth is reiterated in 1 Peter 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."*

And Paul makes it clear that this *"...hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

In the verse we are looking this morning, Romans 15:13, Paul writes, "*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*"

Paul understands in a world of persecution, of Roman rule, of life's mishaps and heartaches, it was easy to fall into despair. **Paul wants the church in Rome to be filled with the joy and peace that come from believing in Christ...**that flows out of our adoption into God's family...flows out of the God of hope...

There is something in Christian hope that no shadows can quench...and that something is the conviction that God is alive. **No man is hopeless so long as there is the grace of Jesus Christ; and no situation is hopeless so long as there is the power of God.**

In researching the word hope in this passage I discovered that **hope in the scriptures is often synonymous with trust.**

Paul is calling on the church in Rome to "*abound in [trust] by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" Trust in God.

Last Sunday, I shared a few of my struggles...the fact I've been carrying burdens, worries, and fears for a long time...many of us have situations that weigh us down and steal our joy...I asked, "Are you putting your full-trust in God, continuing to surrender, to give up control? Are you giving your worries, your situation, your anxiety over to God, allowing God's Holy Spirit to guide you, to fill you with hope? Are you putting your trust in God, allowing the Holy Spirit to remind you that God can and will take care of you just as God has taken care of you before?"

When you truly trust God with the future, with the situation, you will discover "*joy and peace in believing*" ... "*in believing*" in the steadfastness of God...encouraged by the marvelous things God has done we abide in hope, we trust God, for what is not yet but will surely come to be...

Let me say that again... "*encouraged by the marvelous things God has done we abide in hope, we trust God, for what is not yet but will surely come to be...*"

As I come up on finishing my first full year at North East United Methodist Church, I think about all the marvelous things God has done, the countless reasons to hope and to trust in Him as we move forward.

I try to imagine what the streets of North East, Maryland were like in 1794 when a group called Methodists acquired an acre of land down the road, where now one will find the North East United Methodist Cemetery, and built a chapel. When they outgrew the chapel, the land where we now worship was purchased and in 1836 the church was built. In 1902, the church was torn down so that a new building could be erected. It was that church building that burned down in 1911, leading to the church we have now.

Think about the fact that God has been faithful to North East United Methodist Church for 224 years.

... "*encouraged by the marvelous things God has done we [can] abide in hope, we [can] trust God, for what is not yet but will surely come to be...*"

I look back over the last year and am amazed at all God has done. Through North East United Methodist Church, God has worked to reach out to so many people in our community and beyond. God has touched lives through Jill's House, Red Bird Mission, Cecil County Pregnancy Center, Share Your Care, through our Holiday Food Baskets, Operation Christmas Child, Disaster Relief through the United Methodist Committee on Relief, and countless other missions. This church has opened its doors to Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, AA Groups, Al-Anon, and the Boys & Girls Club, connecting with children and their families throughout our community...helping the addicted overcome and persevere.

Around 100 Worship Services have been held since I arrived last July at North East UMC, and lives, from the littlest to the oldest, have been impacted through Small Group Bible Studies, the Women's Retreat, the Deeper Life Crusade, Weekly Devotions in the Bulletin, CFO, the State Park Ministry, Youth & Children's Ministry, and our amazing Preschool.

Over the last few years, renovations were completed in the lobby and sanctuary, as well as the parsonage. The church facility continues to be cared for and soon the Chapel will be renovated, creating a sacred space for prayer and study.

This is just a snapshot of what God has accomplished recently. Could we even begin to voice the many hearts God has changed at this altar, the individuals God has healed, the families God has walked with through grief and sickness, the men and women God has forgiven, transformed, and empowered, the life-long friendships that have been made?

Not only has God done all these things and more...through each of you, His faithful, God has provided the financial means necessary for the work...thus, we stand as a church unburdened by debt.

Look at the marvelous things God has done.

...encouraged by the marvelous things God has done we abide in hope, we trust God, for what is not yet but will surely come to be...

Each of us, if we take the time, can see this same pattern in our lives. We can look back over the years and see how God has moved...how He has blessed us...we can see the many marvelous things God has done in our lives...We must stop and take a day now and then to reflect back, to remember, to write down our many blessings...to see all the ways God has been faithful again and again over the years lest we forget...

Hope in the scriptures is not some generalized emotion that insists everything will be fine...**Hope is a core kind of trust that relies on the steadfastness of God and enables us to be steadfast no matter how dire the situation...**

Why? Because we trust. We have seen God work...we have seen God provide...we have seen God heal...we have seen God love...

Hope is the force that comes from the Holy Spirit as the Spirit reminds us of God's faithfulness and love for us, drawing us beyond the darkness of today toward the light of a new tomorrow.

"The best is yet to be" is the true Christian thought in contemplating the future. Such a statement shows trust in the God who goes before us. This thought also shows that we understand the gift of eternal life that has been set before us.

I read a story about a man who approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, *"Eighteen to nothing--we're behind."*

"Boy," said the spectator, *"I'll bet you're discouraged."*

"Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. *"We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"*

Might we be like that child... *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

Paul understood that there is a huge connection between hope and trust. Trust is a prerequisite for receiving God's gifts, His blessing. Trusting God is our hope.

Let's look at this verse again... *"Now may the God of hope" ...the God who can be trusted... "fill you with all joy and peace in believing" ...Believe...God can be trusted..."so that you will abound in hope" ...you will abound in trust...will continue to trust God...not by your own strength but "by the power of the Holy Spirit" ...*

The Bible warns us against trusting in other things such as idols, riches, foreign powers, military might, or other people. God is the true object of our Hope.

Throughout much of the Old Testament hope was centered on the world. People hoped to be delivered from enemies or illness, to receive land, peace, and prosperity. Toward the end of Old Testament and into the New Testament, through Jesus, the focus shifted from this world to hope in something greater...to hope in the resurrection, hope in a God who walks with us through the storms.

Hope [Trust] is the proper response to the promises of God.

Abraham, though very old, had confidence God would fulfill His promises. Paul tells us in Romans 4:18, "*Against all hope, Abraham in Hope believed.*"

"The best is yet to be..."

One more story. Halford E. Luccock tells the story how one night at dinner a man, who had spent many summers in Maine, fascinated his companions by telling of his experiences in a little town named Flagstaff. The town was to be flooded, as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled, more gone to seed, more woebegone. Then he added by way of explanation: "*Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.*"

Paul wants the church in Rome and us to understand that we have a tremendous hope...and therefore a tremendous power in the present...through the power of the Holy Spirit we no longer need to be afraid...we no longer need to fall into despair...

Paul wants us to understand that God's steadfastness is true and He can be trusted...He fulfilled the prophecies of old...He kept His promises, inviting all into the family of God...He can be trusted with the future...with tomorrow...

If you and I will allow God's Holy Spirit to work, God will lead us to trust Him...will lead us to hope, knowing He can be trusted...which in turn will lead to you and I being filled with "*all joy and peace*" because we believe...

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Whatever might be going on around you...whatever situation you might be facing or may face in the future...know where your hope comes from...know that the God who has taken care of you thus far can be trusted to take care of you into the future...

...in the midst of the storms, "*Hush Child, God Ain't Dead*"...there is hope and our hope does not disappoint...hold on to that hope every day...and believe, know, trust, that "*the best is yet to be*"...