

Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-12

Looking at: Romans 5v4-5a

Theme: Character and Unblushing Hope.

Last week we started to look at Paul's continuing reasons, arguments for a sense of increased assurance of our salvation. They are quite remarkable reasons. In v3-4 he started off "*Not only so...*" indicating there is more to add to the amazing and thrilling things he had already said. We noted 2 things from v3: **1. Crazy Words** - Paul's opening words seem crazy to a world, to people who only love ease and pleasure. We saw they were not crazy words, as God has purposes in our sufferings and tribulations - we are to count it an honour to suffer Christ; it shows us His power in our support and deliverance; He prepares us for usefulness in this life and also prepares us for heaven. Paul did not write those things and then put a full stop, but showed us: **2. Necessary Opportunity** - such are a necessary opportunity to develop, to grow and part of it is patience, endurance, perseverance. We keep on going on even in the hard times. Yet this is not the end of the matter either, for we see 2 more things in v4:

3. The Proof of the Pudding.

It's a quaint, but true saying, that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It not just an important matter as to what it looks like, for if you intend to eat it, it really does matter how it tastes! Paul here uses a word for 'character' that means either the process of proving, or the effect of proving and refers to the character of the experience of something – not just a theoretical thing, but a proven character. One of many things I learned at university while studying timber and forestry, was that there are many timbers that can be used for construction work. Some are better in different situations than others. The

strength of a piece of timber can be worked out by a simple test and calculation - using the modulus of elasticity which is inversely proportional to its modulus of rupture! Basically, if on a testing machine, it bends a lot at a certain pressure it is not very strong and so the less it bends under this pressure, the stronger it is. This is tested on a machine, the timber approved for different grades of work in construction and are marked accordingly – through the testing process, the strength, character of it is shown.

Our sufferings and our patient, ongoing perseverance and endurance in them is both a process of proving and become the stamp, the mark of our being proved too. This is not for God's benefit, for He knows our hearts and relationship to Him, but is for our benefit!

Unbelievers, false professors, even struggling believers can often say something like *"If God let this happen, I'm not bothering with Him again!"* By this unbelievers and false professors show they are not God's in the first place, that God had not been at work in their lives, but it was an emotional decision, a matter of *"life quality insurance"* and they abandon their professed faith so easily. True believers show they are struggling and hurting greatly and need support and comfort and often in contrast to this, the true believer comes to see they are in the hands of a loving and all wise Father. While they can't understand why they suffer such things, yet they want to go on and want to keep on trusting in God and so they cry to Him for help and find that they go on by God's enabling. Missionaries speak of *"rice Christians"* as they are going along with Christian things for what they get out of it -

especially material benefits such as food etc. True Christians have the spirit of Job in 13:15 *“Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him.”*

Tribulations and sufferings not only bring God’s love home to us, but also draws out our love to Him. Instead of loving Him only in sunny, fair weather situations, we find our love is still in place and deepening even in sufferings and tribulations. Here we realise we have proved to ourselves, to our own heart and experience, that we really do have a love for God that is more than just feelings or based on success, for we patiently endure even as we go through the painful trials in which He rubs off the rough edges and smooths out our angular dispositions! Such things are to develop and improve us - as 1 Peter 1:6-7 says *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - **of greater worth than gold**, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* Or James 1:2-4, 12 *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

I mentioned the Amplified Bible a few weeks ago, where it is the aim to bring out, amplify, the full force of the words used. In it v4 is translated as *“And endurance (fortitude) develops maturity of character (**approved** faith and tried integrity).”* Surely that is what we want more and more - mature character, not childish, self-centred, immature character, but developed

and approved; one who can keep their head and faith in the fire. I remember watching a programme on TV which spoke of warfare and how some officers were great in simulations, great in wargames, but in actual warfare (*the Falklands in this case*), they went to pieces. We need battle training and not to be raw recruits in God's army, but be able to strive manfully on, keeping our head, heart and faith. Yet this is not the end Paul aims for alone, but we also see in this process:

4. Muscular Hope.

If we do not exercise, train for a sport, our muscles, our condition, our coordination will all diminish. Hope needs to be developed and here there is no gain without pain - God's process of developing our hope, of keeping it in condition and active is by the process we have seen. The Amplified Bible carries on in v 4 "*And character <of this sort> produces <the habit of> joyful and confident hope of eternal salvation.*"

As we persevere in these things, they are to result in the stimulation of, a progression into a greater, deeper or stronger hope. Our hope becomes "muscular"; we have a fit and active hope, a living and lively hope and not a flabby, out of condition hope. We started with rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, through the process described in v3-4 we find this hope has developed and strengthened. We may think that our hope is not a muscular hope - I used that word to try to conjure up in your mind the robust nature our hope is to develop into over the years of our earthly pilgrimage.

We all will grow and develop in our faith and its application at various rates, just as we all grow and develop in our

physical lives. Physically some develop quicker, others slower; others develop skills as they train, work at some skills and abilities. Our Lord loves us too much to leave us with a limp, flabby hope, a hope not making any effect on our lives, thoughts or faith, nor our society.

Our hope of the glory of God is to be developed by this process and be stronger over time. Sometimes many repetitions of the tribulations process may seem to have little effect, but possibly the perseverance process is being strengthened, other times the proving process, other times the hope is seen to grow and glow and we are more certain of the hope of the glory of God. Often heaven and all it holds means comparatively little to Christian young people, but it means so much more to older people, as the process has been going on, the hope has been developed and constantly active in their hearts and lives.

The process is ongoing, is a circular self-generating process in God's hands and Providence. We learn of our hope of the glory of God, it is to affect our views of even going through sufferings and tribulations. As I said last week, it does not make it hurt less, nor to question less, but we see we are not just victims of random chance happenings, for we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose. Here is where I hoped to reach last week, then to have started at v5 this week. We have a muscular hope, but at the start of v5 it is also:

5. An Unblushing Hope. (v5a)

The Amplified Bible translates this as “*Such hope never disappoints or deludes or shames us*”. Here Paul is taking us from faith (v1-2), to hope (v2, 4-5a) and onto love (v5b). Those words sound familiar - faith, hope and love! Paul directs us to how this hope affects our day by day lives - “*And hope does not disappoint us*” (NIV), “*And hope maketh not ashamed*” (AV).

Yes, our hope is a hope for the future - when we shall see the glory of God in Christ with no barriers in between, when we shall be made like Him and we see Him - “*seeing and being*” are our actual experience (1 John 3:2), but this future hope is to affect and effect our lives today in all we go through. As those who are justified through faith, at peace with God, standing in this state of grace, having this hope of the glory of God, which is a hope developing, maturing in all the processes of life, this hope is to affect us **NOW**.

Our hope is not to cause us to feel shame, disappointment, let down or embarrassed by our God and what He has promised, has done, is doing and will do. Clever commentators point out Paul is using a figure of speech here which is called **litotes** - which means that he is using the negative to express and reinforce, emphasise the positive. Paul uses it in Romans 1:16 “*I am not ashamed of the gospel*” what he is really saying is that “*I boast, I glory in the gospel.*” So here he is saying “*Hope encourages, emboldens, make me say ‘All is well!’*” Our hope does not cause us to blush with shame, but causes us to be flushed with expectation and not let down by our faith or our hope.

As we recognise our love for God and His love in and for us, we are to be more certain, more secure and assured. Therefore, we will not be ashamed or disappointed. Someone who is not clear about what their faith involves and the certainty of it, could so easily be ashamed of it in various circumstances, especially in sufferings and tribulations unless they have theology of suffering, a Bible understanding of what God is doing often in such situations. In NT young Timothy was tempted to be ashamed of old man Paul and all Paul was going through as a Christian - he was in prison, facing death. People may have been questioning Timothy “*Look there’s Paul, a great servant and apostle, why is this happening to him?*” Timothy may well have had the same question. Yet Paul wrote to young Timothy and said “*And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am **not ashamed**, because **I know** whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day.*” (2 Timothy 1:11-12) Paul had a hope and he was keen to encourage Timothy not to be ashamed of the Lord “*So **do not be ashamed** to testify about our Lord, or **ashamed** of me His prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,*” (2 Timothy 1:8) and used Onesiphorus as an example “*May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was **not ashamed** of my chains.*” (2 Timothy 1:16).

Paul tells his first readers and us this hope does not make us ashamed, but bold, proud to share and tell of it, strong, determined and glorying in such a wonderful hope. It means we can glory in tribulations, sufferings, perplexing and hard

times – for in all these things we are more than conquerors (8:37). It is not just a case of thinking “*Well I’d better get on with it as it is in Scripture*”; nor “*I’d better not show hurt or weakness as people will question my faith.*”

Remember we have the privilege of fellowship with other believers and we are able to share **and** bear one another’s burdens. I hope I haven’t given you the impression that we are all to be superhuman and super-Christians! We need to be able to trust one another so that we can be honest about what we are going through and are not just to try and keep up appearances before one another. Our Saviour has put us in the family of the Church, a local church, part of the same local family of the local church, we are of the congregation of the redeemed and we are to help and encourage each other on in our faith, trust and Christian walk. Yes, we may relate to some better than others, but we can ask for prayer as we are hurting, struggling, going through trials, tribulations and testing times, as well as seeking to get alongside those we see are hurting, struggling in various ways.

Paul goes on and draws our attention to something glorious at the end of v5 - the outpouring of the love of this great God towards people like you and me into our very lives and we know it! What a subject to consider, but it is the one we will take up next time! My prayer and desire for us all, is that we will all know this glorious hope developing a Christlike character in us, we be possessed by this unblushing hope and know more fully the outpoured love of God in our lives.