

Sermon 75: Romans 8:24-25: Hope, the Helmet of our Salvation

OUTLINE

The nature of hope

The behaviour of hope

INTRODUCTION

In Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul makes a list of the spiritual armour that the Christian needs to adorn in order to stand firm against the wiles of the devil. There is no part of armour that covers our backs because we are to stand and face our enemy not run from him. Most of the armour apart from the sword and prayer are defensive and not offensive. Today as we explore Romans 8:24-25 we are going to illuminate what Paul means by the 'helmet of salvation.' Each part of the armour relates to the Gospel, the belt of truth is the truth of the Gospel; the breastplate of righteousness is the gift of righteousness found in the gospel and the righteous life of love that flows from it; the shoes indicate our ready obedience that flows from the Gospel of peace; the shield of faith which extinguishes the devil's attacks; and even the sword of the Spirit which is the word of the Gospel. When Paul talks about the helmet of salvation what does he mean? Firstly, we need to note that the helmet is something that relates to the head and the mind. Paul is concerned to speak about something that guards our minds from the attacks of Satan. Some have thought that Paul wants us to think about the salvation that we already have on account of the Gospel, however, if we allow Paul to be his own interpreter we see in 1 Thess. 5:8 what Paul means by the helmet of salvation, 'But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.' Paul wants us to protect our minds with the hope of our salvation.

We certainly need this protection for our minds. We constantly face the temptation to give in to despair. We are surrounded by enemies within and without. The church appears harassed and in decline. The media are constantly dragging the church's name through the mud and anti-God sentiment reigns supreme. On top of that we have the constant pain of life to deal with as we age, get sick, see our loved ones die, experience the effects of others sins like recession and war, etc. Evil looks like it is winning and Christianity has been made to look foolish, this is why we need to think clearly and understand what Paul is saying about hope.

As we consider what Paul says about hope we have two things we need to cover, the nature of hope and the behaviour of hope; we want to discuss what we are looking forward to, what our hope is made of, and how we are to live in light of this hope.

The nature of hope

As we approach these verses we need to remember Paul's overall goal in this chapter. Paul wants these Roman Christians to see the certain nature of their salvation. He had spoken

about the horrible conflict every Christian experiences in 7:14-25, and this would be enough to unsettle any believer. So Paul lays on the comfort in six thick layers showing us the certainty of our salvation. We can be assured of our salvation because 1. Jesus has fulfilled the law and there is no more condemnation towards us; 2. If we have the Spirit who produces holiness we can be certain of resurrection and adoption; 3. If we are adopted we have the Spirit of adoption and are fellow heirs with Christ; 4., and this brings us to the section we are presently dealing with, even though we suffer terribly in this life we can have certainty of our future salvation because of the Spirit who is within us as the firstfruits. Reasons 5 and 6 would be the intercession of the Spirit and the plan of God. So far Paul has told us the we can know we are going to heaven because we have been justified, that means that we have already had our judgement day sentence pronounced over us and on account of Christ's righteousness being put on our account, it is righteous. We are being sanctified as the Spirit leads us in the paths of holiness and helps us to mortify the deeds of the body. We are adopted children of God and heirs of a final inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth. Essentially all that awaits us is Jesus return and we finally receive the resurrection of our bodies.

Given this long argument to show us how saved we are we can easily understand how Paul can use the word saved in the past tense in v24. 'For in this hope we were saved.' The hope mentioned at the beginning of this statement is pointing back to the redemption of our bodies in v23, but notice that Paul talks about the fact that we are already saved. Paul uses the word 'save' in three different ways. He talks about the fact that we are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. He uses the sense of past, present and future. However, we must appreciate the weight of the past tense of saved. It is only on account of the fact that God has justified us in uniting us with Christ that we can be sure that we are being sanctified and will be glorified. We also need to stress that since we are justified we will be both sanctified and glorified. Paul is not positing the hope of future resurrection as a mere possibility but as a certainty. His thought goes something like this, '...you have definitely been saved and set aside for a definite and inevitable glorification.' Jesus speaks with the same certainty in John 6:39, 'And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.' There is no debate just fact. You have certainly been saved and you will most certainly be saved! We are safely sandwiched between these certainties.

This does help us see clearer the way in which Paul is speaking about hope. We use hope in the English language to speak of things that might not come to pass and so we manufacture a positive attitude with the mistaken notion that we can will good things to come to pass if we just hope hard enough. This idea of hope is seen as something weaker than faith, a little less certain. This however is not the way in which Paul describes hope. Hope for Paul is not merely something that is possible but rather something that is certain though future. When he tells us in Romans 5:2 that we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, he is not suggesting that we pretend to think that we will inherit glory and try and force a false joy, but rather that we know that we will most certainly receive glory and rejoice in light of the definite future that we have.

Christianity then has this message of a certain hope that fills our hearts with joy. Contrast this with Atheism. What hope can atheism offer? Your body will be eaten by worms; your money will be spent and wasted by the next generation; your name and accomplishments will be forgotten after you have died; your little life counts for nothing in terms of changing the world and affecting good; don't worry, in a few million years the earth itself will cease to exist! Hopelessness in the extreme. Christianity has a bigger better story that is not fantasy but fact. It is the original epic that all other stories can only badly imitate. It is in Christianity that we see man's true destiny fulfilled in the greatest purpose and joyfulness. It is no wonder then that when a person has cancer that they want to end their lives. If life is not something more than this life, if it all amounts to what we are now, then to escape the pain is the only logical way to think. But for Christians who have hope, who have the prospect of eternal joy, pain is something that can be endured.

Paul continues to shed light on the nature of hope in his next statement, 'Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees.' This really is something that is obvious to us but something serves Paul's purposes well. We all know that we cannot hope for something that is already realized. I can't hope to be preaching this sermon to you on Sunday morning while I am doing it. Hope by its very nature indicates something that is future not present. It is a very simple point he is making but an effective one. Let me try and explain it. We are living in a fallen world in fallen bodies that want to sin being prey for satan and the world to hate and persecute. However, God has saved us in Jesus Christ, He has united us to His Son, justified us by His righteousness, is conforming us into His image, has adopted us into His family, we are saved. However, we do continue to suffer despite the fact that we are saved. We have received so much and do enjoy so much but we do continue to suffer. Paul is reminding us that although we have so much total deliverance is only in the future and not in the present. He is reminding us of this because we need to be reminded that we should not expect a pleasant life in a fallen world, and to wait for it with patience.

In fact it is a failure to grasp this very simple fact, that our deliverance is future that has given rise to various errors. Firstly, there are those who teach that Christians should receive perfect health now. They teach that Christ by His death has won for us not only freedom from the cruse of the guilt of sin but also from its effects on our health. They teach that 'by His wounds we are healed' means not that we are healed from straying from God, healed in our sick hearts from wandering but that we should expect physical healing as a benefit of the atonement. Our simple response to this false teaching is that we are saved in hope, and that we do not yet experience the fullness of our salvation. We would respond with our newly learnt big words, that is a case of overrealised eschatology.

Another case of overrealised eschatology comes in the form of Liberation theology. There are those who believe that Christ's Kingdom can be built here on earth now, that we can alleviate all poverty and free all the oppressed. They seek to establish a veritable heaven on earth politically not realising that this fallen world is not the goal. The mission of the church is not to try and make a heaven on earth, Christ is the one who will make all things new. We must not lose sight of our mission which is to take the Gospel to all nations not to try and make peace states of all nations.

A third instance of failing to know what time it is would be the teaching of entire sanctification or perfectionism. There are those who believe that we can be perfectly free from all known sin in this side of eternity and they hold out this pipe dream before Christians who get crushed and despair because they themselves are not able to stop sinning.

The behaviour of hope

Paul draws us now to the irresistible conclusion. If this is the position that we find ourselves in; if we are indeed justified—having our judgement day verdict already passed; if we are adopted, sealed as heirs, if we have the Spirit as a guarantee and firstfruits of the new creation so that the future glory of the new heavens and earth is certain, then we should be patient. 'But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.' If we have more than a mere possibility but the mere certainty of glory all that is left to us is to wait it out being willing to endure whatever difficulty we have to face with an unshakable joy. This is really where he began in v18 when he said, 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.' He poured scorn on all the suffering of his life, to be considered as unworthy of considering in light of the riches that were his. This sort of thinking is not easily swallowed for we never allow another to make light of our pain, so Paul explained himself arguing it thoroughly and now concludes where he started. Given our present standing and future glory what is a little pain now.

Let's begin by considering the relationship between hope and patience. It was the Puritans who said that hope is both the mother and the daughter of patience. In this verse we are looking at we see that hope is the mother of patience but earlier in Romans in 5:3-4 we see that hope is the daughter of patience/endurance, 'More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.' This hope based on our present standing and our future certainty enables us to endure with patience through difficulty, and this then goes on to increase our ability to hope. The character changes wrought through difficulty remind us that we are God's and where we are headed. The pain of our difficulties turns our hearts from this world and sets our longing upon the new creation focusing our hopes. The Fatherly dealings of God in our trials encourage us and feed our hope. And through having to endure difficulty we learn the skill of keeping our minds on those things that are above. Hope feeds our patience and patience feeds our hope.

Secondly, Lloyd-Jones in his study of this verse points out that patience is not a passive but an active virtue. In other words, patience is something that we purposely have to apply. As a younger person I found that on account of my phlegmatic personality I was indifferent to various trials and difficulties. On the surface I was able to stand up under very trying circumstances that others struggled with. The trouble with the sort of patience that I was displaying is that it was not an active patience that had been wrought by the Spirit through experience but rather it was the uncommendable and dim tolerance of a twit. Patience is not a studied indifference to pain, a sort of machoism that claims 'it does not hurt.' If it does not hurt and you can bear it, then it is not patience. Patience is the virtue of enduring

when we experience a strong temptation to give up. And Paul is telling us that it is our hope that acts as fuel for our patience. When we feel overwhelmed we must put our circumstances on the scales and weigh them against the glory that is not merely possible but certain, though future. When we experience pain, loss, sadness, and all that a fallen world can heap upon us, we have the choice of living as if we were not justified and destined for glory and nothing can take us out of His plans or ruin His plan concerning us; or we can live as if our pain is the only thing that is real, this life is all there is and despair, complain, commit suicide, become atheists etc.

We began by talking about hope as a helmet of salvation. By reminding ourselves of the present salvation we have and the future salvation which is certain we now have a helmet that can protect us from despair and doubt. We have a helmet that uses the truth of our hope to deflect lies and even pain from unsettling us. We find several examples of those who have used hope like a helmet which enabled them to endure through very difficult times.

Our first example is Christ. Christ protected His mind by focusing on the hope that lay before Him. He used hope as fuel for patience and so the writer to the Hebrews writes, 12:1-3, 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.'

Our second example is Asaph in psalm 73. He was tempted to become an atheist because he saw good things happening to bad people and he as a good person was suffering pain and evil. It was not until he was reminded of the final judgement against the evil doer and the glory that he as a believer was going to receive that he was able to find contentment in his situation where he endured pain on a daily basis, v24-26, 'You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.'

Let me end with a modern day example of this listen to the suffering, and then the perspective that a Christian called Mira Jarali of Bangladesh has:

" The thirty Christian families stood in front of the mosque, surrounded by five hundred Muslims. 'You'd better leave Christianity and become Muslim again,' the crowd yelled. 'If you do we will help you. If not we will beat you.'

Mira Jarali and his family stood with the others. 'we were all new converts from Islam, which makes them really angry,' he said. 'Second generation Christians do not upset them as much.'

On that morning, every believer, including women and children, had to stand in front of the Muslim leaders for four hours while each family was questioned. When Mira's turn came to stand before the court, he said, 'In your religion there is no salvation, no hope for going to

heaven. I have Jesus, and now I am whole. Now Jesus has forgiven my sins and I have hope for heaven.'

Following the hearing, all of the Christian families were forbidden to get water from the village well. From that day on, they had to walk and carry their water for more than a mile every day. Then the villagers accused Mira and several others of stealing water. 'The police beat me, kicked me, and put me in prison for thirty days. I was tied to the back of another Christian man. We were beaten for four days then locked in a cell with sixty Muslim prisoners.'

The Muslim prisoners were sympathetic. 'it is better that you are Christians,' they told Mira. 'It is a good life. Muslims are not at peace; they are always fighting each other.'

Mira's land was confiscated by the village's Muslim leader, even though Mira's wife was expecting a baby. Members of his family have been beaten several times. When they walk through the village, people throw mud at them. The Christians have also been attacked in their little house church. Even though they are all new believers they have not been shaken by this harsh treatment.

'We give thanks to God that these things cannot destroy our spirit,' Mira said. 'Jesus told us that we are only here for a few days. We have eternal life and will stay with him in heaven. He will take care of all of this.'" (Jesus Freaks p276-277)