

Romans 12:12 (NKJV)

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

Let's look at this word- rejoicing. The word in the Greek means to rejoice, be glad.

Now how is the word used in scripture? What kind of contexts is it used in?

Mark 14:11 When the Jewish leaders found out that Judas would betray Jesus they were glad... they rejoiced.

Luke 15:5 When the shepherd finds the lost sheep he rejoices.

John 20:20 The disciples were glad when they saw the risen Lord.

Acts 5:41 The apostles rejoiced as they were leaving the run-in they had with the Jewish leaders. They were glad that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

Acts 8:39 The eunuch rejoiced as he left the encounter he had with Philip. He had received and responded to the Gospel.

I think all of these contexts give us a very clear picture of what this is describing.

Paul is talking about the feeling you have when **something you have wanted happens**. The Jews wanted to kill Christ. When Judas showed up it made their day. When a shepherd looked all over creation for a lost sheep and finally found it, it made his day. When the disciples actually got to see Christ, it made their day.

We all know this feeling. What is the last thing **you lost** that **you finally found**?

How did you feel when you found it? That is exactly what this is talking about.

What have you longed for and you finally got word back that your desires were fulfilled? That is what this was talking about.

I remember a time that Carla and I had been in Texas for a week. She had to fly back. My parents were waiting for her at the other end. The time came for her flight to land and it was late. And it kept getting later and later. Now it's not like a plane can be delayed in the same way a car can be. Gravity comes into play at some point. I think it was actually an hour later that I received a call from Carla that her plane had been diverted due to storms and she was safely on the ground in Virginia somewhere. It was at that point that I rejoiced.

I also tend to misplace my wallet once in a while. I always rejoice when I find it.

We all know exactly what this word is referring to. It is actually something that thrills our hearts. There is nothing forced about it. It just happens in response to something that happens.

So now that we have the idea about what rejoicing is in place, let's look at hope.

First what does the word mean? In the New Testament it refers **to joyful and confident expectation of something good...** Usually eternal salvation.

So right off the bat, we need to adjust something in our own heads. We use the word "hope" differently. When we say hope, we usually mean the wish for something good to happen. We will say, I hope it doesn't rain. Or I hope my kids remember my birthday. Or something like that. But that is not how scripture uses the word. When we say hope we are often referring to a wish for something good to happen that may or may not happen.

When scripture uses the word hope it is more like the phrase we frequently use that says, **"I can't wait for."** We don't literally mean that we are not capable of waiting for the thing. What we are saying is we are so looking forward to the event that we wish it were here already. In February we say, "I can't wait for spring." Do we know that spring is coming? Yes. Will we like it when it does? Yes.

Or we say **I can't wait for tomorrow. Or I can't wait for my birthday. Or I can't wait until my package arrives.** Do you get what I am saying?

The scriptural use of the word "hope" refers to enthusiastically anticipating an event that **is certain** to happen.

So let's paraphrase our text, **rejoicing in hope.**

It would be like saying... **"being really glad about the event you can't wait for".** I think that captures the picture for us.

Why is hope so important? Why isn't the fact of what Christ has done for us in the past enough?

Well, let's look at our "present", our "here and now". How does scripture describe this world that we live in?

Galatians 1:3-5 (NKJV)

3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Do you see how Paul speaks of our present world? He calls it this present evil age. We could find lots of verses to support this claim that this world is not our ultimate end. It is full of evil. It is full of rebellion against God. And the devil is the prince of all that is worldly.

And what did Christ die to do? **To deliver us from this age.**

The first thing we need to understand is that this life is not the primary end for which we were saved. There are many who describe this life in very idealistic

terms. They talk about all that we can accomplish as humans. They talk about the utopia that mankind can bring about when they all work together. Even many Calvinistic teachers believe that the church will grow and grow and conquer more and more of the world's populace until it ushers in the kingdom of God.

I don't see any of that in scripture. Everything I see is that this world will get worse and worse until the end. **2 Timothy 3:13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

2 Timothy 3:1-5

1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,

4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Hatred of Christians will be the one thing that the world agrees upon at the end. Even now, the world may treat us nicely, but just let them be in a spot where standing up for us as Christians **will cost them things they value** and you will see what their friendship is **really** worth. It cannot be trusted. It can be appreciated, it can be used for opportunity to minister to that persons mind and soul, but it cannot be trusted in times to come.

We live in a world that hates light, that is in rebellion against our Lord, that rejoices in wrong and hates the right.

I saw a political cartoon from the Chicago Tribune that displayed Tim Tebow, a football player, professing Christ and the news reporter saying "Keep it to yourself". Then Jason Collins, a basketball player professes that he is a homosexual and the news reporter saying, "Tell me more you big hero."

That is the kind of world we live in. And we should not expect differently.

The government's decisions are largely based on things that are self serving to the politicians. We need not be surprised.

The media is largely focused on glorifying sinful lifestyles. We need not be surprised.

Our education system leans more every day to being a means of shaping the direction of our culture than putting facts into kids heads. We need not be surprised.

I don't like it when there seems to be no sense behind the direction our government is headed. The politicians have sold out the future of our nation for their own benefit. And that is evil. But we need not be surprised. **The world will act like the world.**

So what does that have to do with hope? **Everything.**

It is not until we understand the world that we live in that we will understand our desperate need for hope.

Why did Christ come to this planet anyway?

He came to redeem it.

But how? What is His plan for redemption? How does He go about it?

Does he **gradually improve everything** until it all gets better and better? No.

That is not His way at all. He does something completely different. He rescues **individuals** out of this world system and puts them in His kingdom. He puts them in the church. And this will continue to happen until some point in the future. No human knows just when that will be. But it is **a certain point** that the Father has determined from the beginning of time. He has always known it.

And at **that point** all humans will be divided and sent to one of two destinations... either heaven or hell. The earth will be scoured with heat. The surface will be virtually destroyed and then recreated for the Kingdom's use.

That is God's redemption plan.

I like how Martyn Lloyd Jones puts it.

This will be a cataclysmic event, not a gradual improvement. There will be a great crisis. When He is least expected He will come. Far from everything leading optimistically up to our Lord's return, it will be the exact opposite. People's hearts will fail them. Even the elect will be in trouble. Then Christ will come and He will set up His eternal kingdom of glory.

What Paul is saying in our Romans text is that Christ's return is where our eyes must be fixed. This must be central in our minds. We must have this orientation.

Why?

We'll look at what we are told about our present.

2 Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)

12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Think about this. If you were recruiting for a cause, is this what you would say? No. People would not sign up. Unless there was something out there that was **worth more** than what they would suffer.

A Christian is never promised a wonderful set of conditions in this life. We are not promised prosperity. We are not promised good health. We are not promised a life free from pain. We are not promised smooth relationships. We are not promised a long life here. Some people will say that we are, but they are either fools or liars.

Never evaluate the goodness of God by your temporary situation. Never evaluate God's love for you by your temporary condition. That is an error that will do you great harm. Never reduce God's love for you down to one of the conditions you place on Him. We cannot say, **if you loved me God you would** heal my body. We cannot say **if you loved me God you would** remove this pain from my life. We cannot say **if you loved me God you would** improve my temporary condition.

When you look at scripture you find **all the proof for God's love** that you need. We find His love expressed by the means of salvation Christ provided for all of His children. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That is how you can know that He loves you. And then when our conditions cause us to question God, the answer comes down to one word- HOPE.

Not only did God do something wonderful for us in the past but He promises wonderful things for our future. He promises to make any of life's situations we face "worth it". What we get **will always be worth far more** than that which we have ever paid.

Let's look at one of those sections of scripture.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (NKJV)

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

Notice that we aren't promised anything different in this life. We have weak earthen vessels prone to all kinds of weakness and failure. We can expect that. And God does it because He wants to show off His attributes through us.

8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—

We need to get this in our minds and really believe it. This is what the world normally dishes out to believers. When it happens to us, we cannot cry "foul".

We can't act like God pulled a fast one on us. This is predictably what we can expect in this life.

10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Again we see that God has a purpose in all of this. It is not happening for **no reason**. Whatever you are suffering this morning, it is not for **no reason**. God has a reason in it. He wants to display His character through your suffering. Christ wants to show off the life of Jesus through you.

11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

This was the expectation of this life that Paul had. Christ even said that a follower of Christ was going to have to take up his cross, the cross which is a means of death, every day of his life. That is how a believer looks at this life.

But let's go on in II Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NKJV)

16 Therefore we do not lose heart.

Here it is. Here is the reason we do not give up. Here is the reason we can hold on and keep on keeping on.

So what is it?

Will he say, don't worry. The world will start treating you better. Don't worry. They will soon fix the national debt and teach creation and applaud the Christian witness and quit making pornography?

Nope. None of that. That is not our reason to not lose heart. That is not our motivation for staying the course.

Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Do you know another word for all this? **HOPE**.

Paul says the flesh we are living in is dying. It is happening every day. Take all the vitamins you want. Exercise all you want. And there is some value in all that. But in the end, you are going to die. The outward man will keel over some day.

But the inward man- who we really are- that is part of God's redemptive plan. That is something that God is saving. It is being renewed day by day. It is being prepared for eternity.

Now look at what Paul calls his suffering. Light affliction.

Tell me

If you had people throwing pool-ball sized stones at you as hard as they could in an effort to kill you, would you call that light affliction?

If you were drifting about in the ocean on flotsam for days not knowing if you would be rescued... would you call that light affliction?

If you went without food or water for long periods of time, would you call that light affliction?

That is what Paul is calling light affliction.

Is he lying here? Is he exaggerating?

Maybe he was actually a masochist that just loved to suffer?

No. None of that is true.

How can Paul say light affliction?

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

He can say it through the logic of the comparison. He is comparing what he is paying to what he is getting. He is comparing what it is **costing him** to what will be **given to him**.

He says I suffer for a few days. I am rewarded for an eternity. Good deal.

I pay a cost for a small part of my lifetime. I get rewarded with everything I have ever desired for an eternity that cannot be measured. Good deal. I win. That is a small price to pay. I am getting a good deal.

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Look at what Paul is saying. We do not look at the things which are seen. What he is saying is that our focus is not on what can be seen with human eyes. If that were all we focused on, we would be just like everyone else. But that is not our focus. Our eyes see **through faith** all those things that God has **promised to us**. We, as it were, see into eternity. We are fixed on those things. We are learning to want those things more and more. We long for un-ended communion with Christ and all His people. We long for a world without sin, without temptation, without suffering. We long for a world where Christ will be worshipped and

glorified by every living being. We will no longer have to protect ourselves physically, emotionally or spiritually. We can't wait. We just can't wait for that. Anything is worth that. And do you know what that is called?

HOPE!

This is the message of the New Testament. Let's look quickly at a couple of more examples.

Titus 2:11-14 (NKJV)

**11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,
12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,
13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**

See how it all fits together? See how the next life affects this life?

The **hope of one** allows us to face the **hardship of the other**. And not as a victim. We know that we are getting a **great deal**. We know that the cost we are asked to pay is **nothing** compared to the reward we will receive.

I am going to make a bold statement here.

The Christian life cannot be lived apart from hope.

We see it in every epistle. We see the theme of it through the book of Romans. We cannot live in this life properly if we don't have our attention properly set on the life to come.

Let's look at another scripture.

1 John 3:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

We see it all again. We see the love of Christ shown by what He did **in the past** for us. We see how it translates into **the present**- we are in a world that really doesn't like what we stand for. But we see what **is coming**. And we know that it is fabulous. And if we have this hope... if we have this understanding that everything we endure is worth far more than what we pay, then we will purify

ourselves, we will stick to the course, and we will receive the reward prepared for us in glory.

Let's look at one more passage.

Romans 5:1-5 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Here we see it again. We have God's love displayed by **His past act toward us.**

We see **into the future** and we feel like we have **hit the lottery** every time we contemplate getting what we can't wait for.

And because of that we face this present life. And we not only just glumly face it, but we glory in it. Why? Because God is not only **allowing it** but He is **using it to accomplish a purpose.** And what is that purpose. He is changing us. He is redeeming us. He is training us. He is changing us. And for what? To fit into our new home. He is using the present to prepare us for our future. He is using the negative to prepare us for the positive.

And ultimately what does that result in while we are still living? The end result is a strengthened hope. It is making us so we **can't wait for heaven** even more than yesterday. We can't wait more and more.

And what about that hope.

Is it just a pipe dream. Is it really just like Dorothy being led to an Oz that can't deliver on his great promises in the wizard of Oz?

NO!

OUR HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT!

OUR HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT!

What this means is that you will never ever be sorry for faithful living for Christ. It means you will not regret every price you have ever paid for Christ. It means you will never look back and wish you had not endured suffering for Christ. Why.

Because what we look forward to will be better than we ever imagined. We will

never ever be disappointed if we **will trust** the God who rewards us for being faithful.

And how do we know? How do we know this is not a pipe dream? How do we know we are not just believing a myth?

because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

We have the evidence in our hearts. God loves us and He has placed in us love for Him in our hearts.

So how do you know that God will save you? How do you know that eternity will be wonderful? Just look what Christ has done for you already?

So.... What can't you wait for? What fills your heart with anticipation? Is it Christ's return? Is it his reward? This is a question that can be answered. Pay attention to how you think. Just imagine that Christ is going to return at the end of this week. Would it fulfill your every wish, or would it mess up your plans? We as Christians live best when we live hopefully, wildly anticipating our future with Christ.