

## “Helpless . . . but Not Hopeless”—Romans 5:6-8

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Helpless . . . but Not Hopeless”, is Romans 5:6-8 → *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The feeling of helplessness is one of the most difficult experiences to encounter in life for many people. For the person who takes pride in being in control of his life it forces him to depend upon others and demands a humility which cuts to the depths of his pride. Helplessness in the midst of tragedy can leave you feeling at the mercy of circumstances which have always been beyond your control, suddenly becoming a reality demanding life-changing adjustments and decisions. While they have been labeled “acts of God” many times they have felt more like the “curse of the devil.” The real danger is when your helplessness makes a transition into hopelessness.

While many people may try their hand at different activities, tasks or disciplines and conclude that they are a “hopeless cause” because they

can't master them, when it comes to your relationship with God **you are not a “hopeless” cause.** The devil, the world around you and your own sinful nature can easily present the evidence of your sins, failures, shortcomings and so forth to prove you are a “hopeless cause.” Your sinful coping mechanisms and addictions; your slanderous tongue (cf. James 3:2-12); your self-righteous judgments; your immoral thoughts and behavior; the list goes on and on.

Listen: God never sees a sinner as a “hopeless cause.” This means that **God never sees you as a “hopeless cause.”** Helpless, yes. Hopeless, no.

When it comes to our salvation Scripture describes us as *weak*, powerless and helpless. Because of the depth of our sinfulness no matter what we do in our efforts to change this fact of life, it fails. We cannot keep God's laws perfectly; we cannot do enough to make things right with God or others; everything we do is tainted by sin. **We need help!**

Romans 3:20-23 says that *by works of the law* (i.e. all your efforts to make things right) *no human being will be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin . . . For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Sound hopeless? It's not. **It's just that we need help to have a right relationship with**

**God!** Thus, *the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

Verse 6 of our text tell us what **God has done** to give us hope in this state of spiritual helplessness: *While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly—that's us!* In this sense God's help is not like the world's idea of help. While *perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die* (cf. verse 7), God displays His love for us much differently. Anyone might gladly help a friend or someone whom he considers to be “worthy” of help. We may easily love someone who loves us in return. *But God shows His love for us in that **while we were still sinners,** Christ died for us.* (cf. verse 8) God loves the unlovable!

The origin of God's love is much different than ours. Christ did not come so much to change God's attitude toward us but rather to show us what His attitude **really** has been and always is because of Who He is! When Yahweh revealed His presence to Moses He said in Exodus 34:6-7 → *The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.* God loves you with an everlasting love and faithfulness!

Without this love we would be consumed in our sins (cf. Malachi 3:6)

because God is also just, as Exodus 34 continues to say: He *will by no means clear the guilty*. Your sin demands a just punishment. Sound hopeless? It's not. Helpless, yes. Hopeless, no. Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice, suffering the punishment for your sin so that you can live a life of hope in the midst of your helplessness! God never sees a sinner as a "hopeless cause" but rather has given you a great hope through faith in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection **for you!**

When the Scriptures speak about hope for Christians it is not describing some kind of "wishful thinking" or "pipe dream." Certainly our hope has to do with something which is not totally in our possession at the present but looks forward to a future reality. Paul even says in Romans 8:24-25 → *In this hope (i.e. the expectation of the experiencing heaven) we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* Christian hope is not disappointing because we look forward to what we know is certainly ours already because of the Person & Work of Jesus. Why? *Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.* (cf. Romans 5:5)

Even though our helplessness is never gone this side of heaven, we need not let this feeling lead us to think of our lives as hopeless. It is easy for our sights to be focused on everything happening around us and conclude that "the world is going to hell in a hand basket." Looking

to national leadership, public opinions, current events, traditions and even religious organizations does not produce the hope for which people are seeking either. Look hopeless? It's not.

Such a hopeful perspective in the what looks like a hopeless world derives from faith which looks at the world **on God's terms** as He has expressed His love for you in the Person & Work of Jesus. Such hope bows the knee in humility before Him Who lived, died and rose again to give you forgiveness, life and salvation! Such hope comes to Yahweh in humble repentance and helplessness, seeking His forgiveness and submitting to His Lordship over all. Such hope is rooted in Jesus as revealed in the written Word of God—the Bible.

Thus, we fight satan's work of trying to make us feel hopeless by using *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (cf. Ephesians 6:17) and let *the word of Christ dwell in us richly* (cf. Colossians 3:16) as we read that word daily. I even challenge you to spend just as much time reading your Bible as you spend watching the news, reading newspapers, listening to talk radio and TV talk shows, reading blogs and so forth each day.

The struggle with the presence of sin in your daily life and the sufferings which accompany it never overcomes the victory which Jesus has won over its power for you. Faith clings to the steadfast, dying love of God displayed in the Person & Work of Jesus with a hope given you

by the Holy Spirit as the sure anchor of salvation! (cf. Hebrews 6:19). This is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:13 → *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.* And the greatest love for us helpless sinners is the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

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

(Romans 15:13)

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