

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
© Dr. Stephen Felker, Interim Pastor
Harvest Christian Fellowship (<https://hcfellowship.com/>)
Sunday, January 1, 2023

Romans 15:13, 33 “A Blessing for the New Year”

Intro. Verse 13 is a great summary of the blessed life formed by our oneness with Jesus Christ. But such a life is far different from that lived by many Christians, and certainly by unbelievers. Too many lack hope when they face the darkness of suffering or death. Too many are bothered with sadness and worry. And how many Christians do you know that are *filled* with hope, joy, and peace, almost on a continual basis? Yet that is the kind of life that we *can* have, and that is the kind of life that I wish for you in this coming year.

The context of our text today is the appeal by Paul for spiritual unity. Differences of opinion concerning religious practices were dividing some of the Roman Christians. There were manifestations of division between Jew and Gentile. But Paul concludes his appeal for unity with v.13. In substance it points to the true remedy for religious controversy. Fill the contending parties with a fuller spiritual life, and their differences will begin to dwindle and look very contemptible. It's like what happens when the tide rises. The little pools in the sand are all merged into one. Even so, as the tide of our spiritual lives rise together, we can become one, and experience the unity that God intends for us to have. [Maclaren, p.344].

So let's look at the kind of spiritual life that God wants us to have. We read way back in the book of Genesis that He *wants* to bless us (12:3; 22:18). The Christian life is truly a blessed life if we live it as God intended. I challenge you to rise to the spiritual level that God's wills for your life in 2023, and you will indeed be blessed. So let's see first of all:

I. THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE BLESSINGS

In v.13 we see 3 vital Christian blessings that I wish for you to experience this coming year. First of all, he wants to bless your life with:

A. Hope – V.13 says, “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.” He had just said of Jesus in the previous verse, “in him will the Gentiles hope.” Notice also that God is called “the God of hope.” He is the God who gives hope, and He wants us to “abound in hope.” Furthermore, Jeremiah 29:11 (NASB) says, “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Yet we live in a dark world that seems to be plagued with hopelessness and despair. In fact, Paul said to the Ephesians that before they became Christians, they were “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Friend, if you don't have God, you don't have hope. As you face death, if you don't have God, you don't have any hope. In fact, in 1 Thess. 4:13 Paul wrote, “that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” So in contrast to unbelievers, God wants our lives to be enriched with hope.

What is hope, anyway? In the New Testament hope is not merely wishful thinking. It is not just optimism. Rather, the word “hope” indicates a positive future that is not seen, and yet, it is an absolutely certain reality (cf. Heb. 11:1). Our hope is as sure as the character of God, which guarantees His promises, for God cannot lie. Paul has mentioned the promises of God several

times in this epistle (4:18¹; 5:1-5; 8:24-25; 15:4). For example, in Rom. 5:2 says that “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Yes, we are destined for the glories of heaven, and to experience glorification in our own lives. So I have a sure and certain hope that I am going to heaven when I die. Jesus said, “Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19 NKJV). He conquered death and we will share in His victory. In 1 Peter 1:3 Peter talks about have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” So I also have a sure and certain hope that I will see my parents and sister in heaven. Why? It is because God has *promised* eternal life to those who have placed their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. And God cannot lie. And such promises are recorded for us in Scripture. Paul wrote in v.4, “For whatever was written in former days was written ... that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Hope is actually an indispensable quality of life, especially during times of difficulty. Back in 1927 a Navy S-4 submarine was rammed by a Coast Guard vessel off the coast of Massachusetts and quickly sank. The entire crew was trapped in its prison house of death. Ships rushed to the scene of disaster. But bad weather hampered the rescue efforts. The next day they returned and a diver learned from the tapping of the dots and dashes of the Morse Code that only 6 had survived at one end of the submarine. It was estimated that the oxygen on board would last only 48 hours. Meanwhile, one of the attempts to rescue the survivors failed. Later, a diver placed his helmeted ear to the side of the vessel and listened. He heard another tapping noise. The question came slowly: “Is... there... any... hope?” This seems to be the cry of humanity: “Is there any hope?”² The response, composed by Captain King was: “There is hope. Everything possible is being done.” Yet as it turns out, there *was* no hope for those sailors. They were not rescued in time. Yet any *Christians* in that vessel still had hope of eternal life even in the face of death!

Some of these Roman Christians would soon suffer for their faith under the Roman Emperor Nero. Some would be arrested and tortured. Some would even be put to death in a horrible way. But with the hope that Paul speaks of, they faced the future with confidence and optimism, and that hope sustained them through their times of trial. As long as we have hope, we can joyfully endure our trials with patience.

And as we face 2023, we may wonder what the New Year may bring. Will there be a major terrorist attack? Will earthquakes and hurricanes strike America? Will there be a major downturn in the economy, with many losing their jobs? Will the surge of crime and violence get even worse in our cities? Will you find out that you or a loved one has been diagnosed with a serious illness? I tell you, the harder you look at the world, the more hopeless things seem to be. Yet we as Christians have reason to hope. The attitude of the Christian mind ought to be a cheery optimism, an unconquerable hope. “The best is yet to be” is the true Christian thought in contemplating the future for myself, for my family, for God’s church, and for God’s universe.

One special hope of the Christian is the return of Christ. Tit. 2:13 (NKJV) says that our blessed hope is “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The return of Christ will not only complete *our* salvation, but it will also bring salvation to the whole world! War and violence will end and there will be world peace. Poverty will be replaced with

¹ 4:18: “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979), 564; <http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=361> and Wikipedia.org.

abundance, and every need will be met. The curse will be lifted. Oh yes, God gives us a wonderful hope!

Not only does God want to cause hope to abound in you, but secondly, He also wants to fill you with:

B. Joy (v.13) – What is this joy that God wants you to have? It is a form of gladness and delight and is similar to happiness, but it is inward, independent of circumstances. In Jn. 16:22 Jesus told His disciples of a joy that no one would be able to take away from them. The joy that Paul is talking about is joy *in* the Lord and *from* the Lord. He is the one that gives us this inward joy. Gal. 5:22 says “the fruit of the Spirit is... joy.” Do you have the joy of the Lord? There are some folks that clearly seem to have the joy of the Lord on a regular basis. You can just tell it right on their face.

Now God adds to our joy in different ways. For example, salvation brings great joy. In Acts 16:34 (NKJV) we see that the Philippian jailor “rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” [cf. Acts 8:8]. I hope someone, even today, will experience the joy of getting saved. Furthermore, praise brings joy. Psa. 9:2 (NKJV) says, “I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” Seeing God work in answer to prayer brings joy. In Jn. 16:24 (NKJV) Jesus said, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” Christian fellowship brings joy. Phm. 1:20 (NKJV) says, “Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.” And finally, hope produces joy. Rom. 12:12 (NKJV) talks about “rejoicing in hope.” Romans 5:2 (NKJV) says “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” So God gives hope, which also gives us joy in anticipation of what is to come.

A favorite old hymn of some was inspired by the glowing face of a man who seemed to live continually upon the lofty peak of consecration to God. Seeing him in the audience during an evangelistic campaign, a famous preacher noticed his radiant expression. [By the way, preachers do notice the expressions that are on people’s faces]. The message that night was about the return of Christ, and often the man with the shining countenance would exclaim joyously, “Yes, yes! And that will be glory for me!” After the service the speaker inquired, “Who is the brother with the blessed testimony?” “Oh, that’s old glory face,” replied his informant. “He’s a Christian who always seems to be on the mountaintop.” Later, Charles H. Gabriel was so impressed with that man that he was moved to write his gospel song, “O That Will Be Glory for Me.”³ Find it on YouTube and listen to the words this afternoon.

That’s the way it ought to be with us. We ought to live our lives with joy on our faces, as well as in our hearts. And as I said, as we think about our blessed hope, that will add joy to our lives.

There is yet another blessing that I wish for you this year. God wants you to have His:

C. Peace – V.13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace....” This is most likely a reference to the peace *of* God, that inward peace which God gives. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Phil. 4:7 (NKJV) says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Do you have God’s peace? Do you have that sense of tranquility and serenity that all is well, for you are confident that a loving God is in control? Can you sing with the hymn writer,

³ H.G. Bosch in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, 681 [#2830].

“It is well with my soul”? Even when things don’t look so well outwardly, God wants you to have His peace. By the way, our Christian hope brings peace to our hearts, for we know that ultimately everything will be okay.

This peace begins with being at peace with God. Romans 5:1 (NKJV) says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” A man can never, down to the roots of his being, be at rest until he is quite sure that he is right with God. Is there someone here today who needs to make things right with God? It is only then that you can experience not only peace with God, but also the peace of God.

And so we see some of the blessings that God wants you to have. He wants you to have hope in a world that at times seems hopeless. He wants you to have joy in a world of sadness and depression. And He wants you to have peace in a world of turmoil and worry. So we see the substance of the blessings. Now let’s move on and see:

II. THE SIZE OF THESE BLESSINGS

We live in the day of the super-sized menu. You can order a super-sized Coke, fries, and a super-sized double or triple burger. *That* is not really good for your health. But God wants to super-size His blessings in your life, and that *is* good for you! The kind of life God wants you to have is not empty, but full. Note the words in v.13 that describe this abundance: “fill you” and “all” and “abound.” The word “abound” (*perissos*) literally means “to overflowing.” In the 23rd Psalm, David said that his cup “runs over.” Would you like to have life that overflows? Wouldn’t you like to have life that is full of all that is good? You can! In v.14 Paul says, “I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge....” Jesus said in John 10:10 (NKJV), “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

God wants us to discover the spiritual abundance that He came to provide for us. For example, it is not just joy, but a fullness of joy that is spoken of here and elsewhere in the Bible. I John 1:4 says, “And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” In John 15:11 Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” So God wants your life to abound in hope, and be full of joy and peace.

Is your life full of hope, joy, and peace? Or do you have hopelessness, sadness, or a troubled spirit? Well, if you do not have fullness of hope, joy, and peace, then you especially need to listen to my final point. We have discussed the substance of these blessings, and the size of these blessings. Now let’s consider together:

III. THE STEPS TO RECEIVING THESE BLESSINGS

I ask you this morning, do you know the hope that God has promised? Do you know the joy of the Lord? Have you experienced God’s peace on a regular basis? Well, if you want hope, joy, and peace, notice with me how to receive the fullness of these blessings. First:

A. By Understanding that *God* Is the Source of these Blessings – This prayer of blessing begins and ends with God. Furthermore, v.13 says that God is the God of hope. Then He is called

the God of peace in v.33. And can it not be rightly stated that He is the God of joy⁴? He is called such because He is the source of these blessings, and He generates these blessings within us.

So don't look to the world for hope, joy, and peace. Now you can find temporary laughter and fun in the world, but not joy. You can get drunk or take drugs and dull your senses to the point that you create a temporary false peace. I imagine a lot of people got drunk last night but aren't feeling so good this morning. But only the Spirit of God gives joy, and a true sense of peace. So look to the Lord as the source of the blessings of hope, joy, and peace. Make sure you have a saving and growing relationship with God, for hope, joy and peace come from Him.

Furthermore, we receive these blessings:

B. Through the Power of the Holy Spirit – The divine agent who transmits these blessings to us is the Holy Spirit of God. Notice in the last of v.13 that Paul wishes “that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope...” Yes, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we have hope, and these other blessings. In fact, we know from Gal. 5:22 that joy and peace are among the fruit of the Spirit.

That being the case, seek the filling of the Holy Spirit as Eph. 5:18 commands. As you are filled with the Spirit, you will be filled with hope, joy, and peace. How are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Ask in prayer. Obey the Spirit. Follow the leading of the Spirit. Rely upon the Spirit, and you will know fullness of hope, joy, and peace. Don't try to produce this hope, joy, and peace from your own resources. Don't look to the sinful or worldly sources of hope, joy, and peace. Instead, rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. And this leads to the last step. We receive these blessings:

C. Through Faith – Once you understand the true source of these blessings, then the next step is to place your faith in God, who alone can fill you with hope, joy, and peace. Notice in v.13 that “all joy and peace” is ours “in believing.” That is our responsibility. In the broader context such blessings come to those who believe the great truths set forth in this epistle, including justification by faith in the sacrificial blood of Christ. So Paul wishes to drive home to us that the attitude of trust is the necessary prerequisite for God being able to fill a man's soul. The best, the highest, the truly divine gifts which He is yearning to give to us all cannot be given except for the presence of faith. Faith is the hand that receives these blessings from God. It is in believing that joy and peace come to us and make their abode with us.

And so, as we place our faith in the promises of God, we have hope. As we trust God as our source of true, lasting happiness, we have joy. And as we place our faith in the sovereign purposes of God, the promises of God, and the power of God, we have peace. Let us be done with all that robs us of hope, joy, and peace, such as worry, which is the opposite of faith. Sin will take away peace and joy. Instead, let us place our faith in God.

Allen Emery wrote a book some time ago entitled, *A Turtle on the Fencepost*. In it he tells about the night he spent on the plains of Texas with a shepherd who was keeping two thousand sheep. He said that when evening came the shepherd built a fire for cooking supper and also to provide some warmth. After the sun had gone down and the stars had come out, Emery

⁴ That phrase is not found in Scripture, yet Zep. 3:17 says, “The LORD your God is in your midst...; he will rejoice over you with gladness; ...he will exult over you with loud singing.” Ps. 149:4 says, “For the LORD takes pleasure in his people...” Isa. 62:4 says, “the LORD delights in you...” Isa. 62:5 says, “... as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” In Isa. 65:19 God says, “I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people...” In John 15:11 Jesus spoke of “my joy.”

says that he heard the wail of a coyote. In a few moments he heard the answering call of another coyote. At the sound of the coyotes the shepherd got up and threw some extra logs on the fire. In the light of the larger fire Emery says that he looked out at the sheep and saw thousands of little lights. He realized that these were reflections of the fire in the eyes of the sheep. Now here's the point: In the midst of danger, the sheep were not looking out into the darkness toward the danger, but were keeping their eyes set toward the shepherd. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." In the dark times of life, we should keep our eyes on our shepherd, and trust in Him. He is the One who will sustain us with hope. He is the One who gives peace and joy.

And notice that Paul is talking about a present, ongoing faith. "Believing" is a present tense, which in the Greek describes continual or habitual action. So he is not referring to blessings received the moment you *first* believed and were converted. Instead, these blessings come to those who *continue* to exercise faith on a daily basis. Some Christian people imagine they can live upon past faith. You will get no *present* joy and peace out of *past* faith. If you would have a continuous flow of joy and peace, keep up a uniform habit and attitude of trust in God. It must be like the manna, gathered fresh every day. Is there, then, any wonder that so much of the experience of ordinary Christians should present a sadly broken line – a bright point here and there, separated by long stretches of darkness? The gaps in the continuity of their joy and peace are the clear indicators of the interruptions in their faith. The one who does not dwell in the Lord's joy and peace is simply failing to exercise the faith that God has given him. On the other hand, continual joy and peace is possible for the one who *continues* to exercise faith in God day by day.

So through faith we experience the blessings that I have spoken of today. For example, we can have joy through faith. 1 Peter 1:8 says, "Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory." And we can have peace through faith. Whoever trusts is at peace. Prov. 31:11 (NKJV) says of the virtuous wife, "The heart of her husband safely trusts her." That is an illustration of what faith will do. And finally, we can have hope through faith. If I am living in an atmosphere of trust, then sorrow will never be absolute. If we believe God, we will have hope, for He has given us many wonderful promises regarding our future!

Conclusion: Don't you want to have these blessings in your life fully and continually? Don't you want fullness of hope, joy, and peace? God has provided these blessings through the work of Christ, and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Now, you must do your part. The starting place for some of you will be to trust in Jesus as your Savior. Remember, v.13 says that we have "all joy and peace in believing." I invite you to trust in Christ as your Savior. Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved, and you can begin to experience the blessings of hope, joy, and peace today!

If you are already a believer, but are lacking these blessings, then it is time to renew your faith and obedience in the Lord. At the beginning of this New Year, why not recommit your life to the Lord. Get the joy and peace back in your life. Trust and obey. That is the way to be happy in Jesus. Do it now!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Curtis Vaughan & Bruce Corley, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the*

Entire Bible (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2022; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1886); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Dale Moody, *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Romans*, Vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman, 1970); John Murray, *The New International Commentary: Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: A Practical Guide to Discover How to be Right with God, Yourself, Others* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1978); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker. Dr. Felker's email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).