

**Sunday 24th May 2020**

**Hope in our weakness – Romans 15:1-13**

**Talk by Russell Jones, Prayers by Margaret Davies**

Welcome to today's service in our sermon series on hope. Margaret will lead us in prayer after the talk. I will begin by reading Romans chapter 15 verses 1-13. You might find it helpful to have Romans 15 open as you listen so that you can follow references to it in the talk that follows.

First, a short prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to receive your truth through your words that we might grow in faith and trust. **Amen.**

**Romans 15:1-13**

*1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

*5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:*

*"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing the praises of your name."*

*10 Again, it says,*

*"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."*

*11 And again,*

*"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;  
let all the peoples extol him."*

*12 And again, Isaiah says,*

*"The Root of Jesse will spring up,  
one who will arise to rule over the nations;  
in him the Gentiles will hope."*

*13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Today's passage begins 'We who are strong...' and we all have to accept that some are strong in faith and others are weak, but that even the strong have times of weakness when they feel doubt, defeat, and dryness. We are going through a time where we miss the support of meeting together as a church in person, and where much of the midweek activity is impossible. We also have to face the strains of staying at home for weeks on end, and have worries about the health of our relatives and friends. Paul's words are encouraging and strengthening for everybody, whether you're an experienced or new Christian, whether you're feeling tired or full of enthusiasm.

When he wrote this passage to the church in Rome, people were arguing about whether to eat certain foods or not, the foods that were considered unclean by Jews – many early believers were Jews who recognised that Jesus was the Messiah they had been promised, but they were afraid to stop following the food laws given to Moses. They were the weaker believers in Paul's mind. That sounds like a silly problem to us but we may worry about other activities as being unacceptable to a Christian. Drinking a small glass of sherry to celebrate a birthday at an evening meeting; holding the Annual Church Meeting on a Sunday although it includes secular business; listening to a Rolling Stones album – all of these are things that I've heard Christians agonise over – are they decent or indecent actions? Should I speak out against such unholy practices?

Paul makes it clear that there is room for difference in the unity of Christian belief. We who are strong, not worrying about food restrictions because Jesus declared all food to be clean, ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 'Bear with' doesn't mean put up with in a grudging way but support and help those whose personal convictions are bringing them concerns. We're not to please ourselves, which doesn't mean 'never enjoy yourself', but does mean that we can't do whatever we like if it offends the scruples of others. Be considerate; help and encourage others.

We have been given an example of that, Jesus himself. Are we making a big sacrifice in our lives for the sake of others right now? Well, let's compare that to the sacrifice made by Jesus for us. And we don't have to do it in our own strength because we have 'the encouragement of the Scriptures', mentioned in verse 4, and the encouragement of God's response to our prayer and praise. That praise is loved by God when it is given in 'a spirit of unity among yourselves', verse 6, 'with one heart and mouth'. The church wants to be in unity with more people who are currently outside God's love, but when we offer to care for those in need, it's a sign that we accept that we too are in need of God's help. When the strong accept that they are weak, then 'you glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. It is also a sign of change in us, away from the selfish life that characterises the world.

If we carry God's word and God's care to others, we are ministers of Christ, and the ministry that Paul writes about in our passage especially is ministry to the Gentiles, those who don't know God. He mentions 'everything that was written in the past', and then quotes four examples to show that God's plans had always included the whole world, not a select few. The promises were made to the patriarchs, like Abraham and Moses, 'so that the Gentiles (that is, those outside God's chosen people of Israel) may glorify God for his mercy'.

It is really unusual for a writer in the New Testament to quote four different sources in support of an idea, but this is what Paul does in verses 9 to 12, introducing the quotations with the words 'as it says', then 'again, it says', then 'And again', then finally 'and again', so we get the idea this is a pretty important point that the Gentiles were included among God's chosen people from the beginning. Remember the hearers of this were mostly Jews and this would be especially striking to them because he quotes Psalm 69 back in verse 4, one of songs well known for prophesying the coming of the Messiah. Then he refers in verse 9 to 2 Samuel, known by Jews as a 'former prophet', then to

Deuteronomy, part of the 'Torah', God's law, then to Psalm 117, part of 'the Writings', and finally to Isaiah, known as a 'Latter Prophet'. All the sections of the Hebrew Scriptures are covered, and have been fulfilled in the promised Christ. Can you see the progression in them? First, the Jews glorify God among the Gentiles; then, the Gentiles rejoice with his people; then, all the Jews and Gentiles together praise God; finally, Christ will reign over all peoples. The quotation from Isaiah, saved until last, is a great promise: 'he will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him'.

At one time the Gentiles were without hope but now they have Christ's hope; we have been given that great hope although we didn't earn it. Not only that but look at verse 13. As well as hope, we have joy and peace, and the power of the Holy Spirit to live in us and strengthen us so that we can trust in the promises of hope, joy and peace.

We are under his rule, and all of the nations are under his rule, even if they don't realise it. The Bible has many examples of pagan nations being used by God and who can tell how God is operating at the moment in the world? Things are difficult for most at the moment but we can trust in God's word. Remember that verse for us to carry through our lives to help when we face difficulties. It was the keynote verse 2 weeks ago, and given prominence by Ian again last week, and now I'm repeating it: 'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him', which is Romans 8.28.

God is working for our good now, and the nations will serve his purposes. We can't know how or when, but we have assurance that this is the case and that God's great love for us will go close alongside us at every step. We can trust Him.

A prayer to close: Father we thank you for the great promises you have made, and the assurance that you have offered through your Son's death and resurrection. May you bless us with hope, joy and peace. We welcome your Spirit and your power in our lives. Help us to trust in you each and every day. Bless the world around us and work your purposes in it. Amen.

## **Prayers**

Last Thursday was Ascension Day when we remember the risen Jesus was taken from his disciples up into heaven having promised them the Holy Spirit. We will remember that next Sunday. These days in between the two events the global church is praying, " Thy Kingdom Come".

We pray: Lord God Almighty, we thank and praise you for raising Jesus from death for us and for his ascension into heaven to be with you and to prepare a place for us. Thank you for the promise of The Holy Spirit to give us the power to be witnesses for him. Therefore, we pray with the world wide church for your Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. May the church everywhere be making new Christians and producing disciples to love, share and support each other whether weak or strong. We pray for our own family members and friends, that they will come to know you. Help us to pray each day this week for your Holy Spirit to work in their lives.

We pray for our mission partners. Bless Jason and Tracey Day in Thailand, Jenny Archibald and Victoria Parslow wherever they are working. We pray, too, for the Christian aid agencies working all over the world. May they all be sharing your love as they help the poor, needy, isolated, persecuted, ill and bereaved in our world.

Oh Lord ,our Heavenly Father, we pray for wisdom for governments and those in authority to make the right decisions about future life and economies returning to normal. Heavenly Father, we claim your promises to watch over us continually, protecting and guiding us always. We pray that the

scientists will find the cures, tests and vaccines that are needed for Covid 19. Please heal all those who are ill with coronavirus. Thank you for all the key workers at this time in health, care and community. Give them good health, strength and energy.

We thank you for our church fellowship. We pray for our church wardens, Ian and Steve. Bless Sue, our preachers and homegroup leaders. May we all teach, lead and pastor everyone. Comfort and heal all those who are suffering in any way. Give them courage and hope in you Lord Jesus. We pray for those who are ill, especially Val Beckway. Bless her hospital appointment this week. May the stitches come out successfully and her wounded leg heal soon. Keep Anthony Wedderburn's health improving as he prepares to rejoin the community. Give your comfort, Lord, to all who are bereaved, particularly because of the virus. Especially Emma Blizzard's extended family and Yvette Evans and family. We pray for anyone known to us personally.

Let us bring our prayers together by saying The Grace:

**May the Grace our Lord Jesus Christ  
and the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen**