

Seeds of Hope and Where They Grow

Romans 15:4; 8-33

Romans (no. 43 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

So, Lord God, I pray that you would help us to believe this stuff we sing. In Jesus' name, I pray, Lord God, that you would cause us to preach. Amen.

Message



This Message is really a continuation of last week's message from Romans 15, titled Seeds of Hope. I ended with a creepy story, rather hard to believe, that I could talk about for hours, but I only have time to reference in sermons.



About 12 years ago, my wife, our church cleaning lady, came and got me in my office down at the old church building we were renting on 30th and Vallejo. She had heard weeping coming from behind a crawl space door that led to a dark room directly under the stage in the sanctuary.ⁱ In that room we actually found bulletins from the turn of the last century that corroborated things that Jesus had revealed to Susan in a previous vision—which helps critics like me trust that they’re not just crazy.

As I told you last time, in that dark room under the old sanctuary, my wife saw these figures cowering in the darkness. We had learned that they weren’t demons, (demons react violently to the Word); they were what the Bible calls phantasma, familiar spirits or ghosts—they were the dead who wouldn’t die, the undead dead—the souls of people who would not hear the Word: Jesus—the name means “God is Salvation.”

Not knowing quite what to do, I prayed that Jesus would reveal himself, and he did—he did along with a door that opened behind him to an entire new creation. Susan saw it and she saw Jesus who is himself the Door and the Glory of God. Then she said, “Peter they won’t look up—the shadows in the darkness—they’re still cowering there and covering their eyes.” And so, I just began to tell them about Jesus. I just said stuff like, “He doesn’t hate you; he loves you; he came to save you; he doesn’t condemn you; he has forgiven you; he knows you and he likes you; And look, he makes all things new.” As I was speaking, Susan started whispering in my ear, “Peter some of them are starting to look up. And the moment they see him, they rise and go to him, transformed by him and then they pass through that door.” So, what made them look up, and then stand up, and pass through the door? I think it was hope—hope which came to them as a Seed.

Romans 8:24 “In this hope we are saved.” In the last chapter Paul told us that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, which Paul also calls the judgment seat of Christⁱⁱ—or perhaps judgment seat that is Christ. That can happen while your body walks the surface of this earth, or it can happen long after your physical body has turned to dust and all that remains is your psychic body, your soul.

It can happen now or then, but it will happen. And what matters on that day is not your resume. It doesn’t matter, at least not in the way you think it matters. It’s not your accomplishments, your

kingdom of dust. It doesn't matter, at least not in the way you think it matters. Paul tells us that God will render to each of us according to our worksⁱⁱⁱ, but what he renders is always Grace. Grace usually burns before it heals, so what matters on that day is hope. Hope is faith for the distance between you and your creator. Hope is knowledge of Good and evil and faith for the journey from evil to the Good. What matters is Faith in Love, for God is infinite Love that cannot be bought; God is Grace. So, Faith in Love is Hope in the character of God. That day I realized that whether I was famous or infamous, considered a success or a failure, looked brilliant or appeared a fool—what mattered was planting seeds of hope, for in this hope we are saved.^{iv}

Twelve years ago, in the crawl space under the sanctuary, the ghosts in the darkness were all kneeling. Death will bring you to your knees and “every knee will bow,” But only hope will make you praise God for Salvation, the Revelation of Jesus. Only hope will make you look up, stand up, and walk you through the door. “At the name of *Yeshua*, every knee will bow, and every tongue will give praise to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord.”^v

In the last chapter Paul wrote “Who are you to judge the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be made to stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”^{vi} But some of the ghosts in the darkness, didn't look up and they didn't stand. Then Susan heard the Lord say, “I'm leaving this door here for those that will still come.”

When I used to preach and it appeared that no one was listening, I'd picture those shadows in the darkness—I'd picture them as I preached the Gospel and it seemed to go nowhere but just drop into the ground, like a seed. I believe that one day they will all look up, all “see,” and all “understand,” just as Paul says they will and it will all be the Work of the Word, who is the Seed, who is the Promise: “God is Salvation; Jesus.” You cannot make people hope in “God is Salvation,” by threatening that he might not be salvation because of them—particularly when it is them that they need to be saved from. I ended the sermon last week by saying “Put your faith in the Seed and sacrifice your kingdom of dirt.”

Romans 15:4, 8-9:

...Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope....⁸ For I tell you that Christ became [a minister of circumcision to show God's truthfulness], in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,⁹ and [moreover] that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore, I will praise you ~~among~~ (*en*: literally “in”) the Gentiles and sing to your name. (2 Sam. 22:50, Psalm 18:49)¹⁰ And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people (Deut. 32:43).”¹¹ And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles [not “some Gentiles.” “all you Gentiles”], and let all the peoples extol him (Psalm 117:1).”¹² And again Isaiah (11:1,10) says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles (the unbelievers) hope.”¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy (not some joy, all joy) and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Do you see what Paul just did? He planted Scripture like a seed. And last week I said that I hoped that you would hope and plant seeds of hope where no one has planted them before, and that would be the dirt, the despair, and discouragement in the people with whom you have a relationship—a relationship unique in all the world. I’m asking you to plant seeds of hope. I’m asking you to “evangelize” (*euangelizo*) your neighbors and particularly those that call themselves “Christians” but do not believe that God is Salvation—that God is Jesus, all the time.

And to that end I prepared some seeds of hope: [Get the Handout Here](#).

I’ve been wanting to do this for a long time and haven’t found the time. It’s just a page, front and back, of a few of the Biblical Texts that I find to most clearly state that God is Salvation, and that God does not fail. Paul just gave you some seeds of hope in Romans 15, and now I’m just giving you some more. And I’m just asking you to plant the seeds. You don’t have to defend them, explain them, or even comprehend them—just dare to believe them, and so plant them—plant them, when the time is right, in your neighbor. And don’t be surprised if they get angry. Remember: “Maximum hope is minimum control. “And the human ego is a soul that believes it is in control, and yet that is the very prison from which we each need to be saved.

So just plant the Seed. Give a hug, which means I have hope for you. Even better say the Word. Say “Jesus, it means ‘God is Salvation.’” And when they say, “not for me,” or “not for them,” plant some of these seeds. For instance, just say: “Well, I believe Revelation 21:4, ‘God is making all things new,’ and that would include you and everyone that’s anyone.” And when they argue, just say, “Well I believe Scripture is true, don’t you?”

You can do that with all of these texts: They’re not obscure texts; they’re central to the narrative of Scripture; and the translation is straight forward. And if they say, “Well sure, but I believe all these other texts—about hell, wrath, and judgment—are true,” I hope you can say, “Well I believe all the texts are true.” And then ask them, “Why do you think your verses mean that these verses are untrue? I may not be able to explain every Scripture, but I believe that all of Scripture is true.” ^{vii}

And if you want to help folks see how it can all be true, I hope you grab a copy of my little book *All Things New*, or just re-read Romans. And I’m happy to help. So, when people say, “Yeah, but this and yeah but that,” I want you to think of me as your “Yeah but man.” But if you don’t want to deal with any of that or think you shouldn’t—that’s ok, just plant the seed. Like we learned last time, the Word can do its work, all on its own; it’s a Seed.^{viii} Jesus is the Word, and he animates Scripture.

Romans 15:13-21:

¹³ **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.** ¹⁴ **I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.** ¹⁵ **But on some points, I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God** ¹⁶ **to be a minister of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.** ¹⁷ **In Christ Jesus, then, I have [“the**

boast unto”] God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God. I make it my [labor of love] to [announce the Good News], not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, ²¹ but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand [*sunimi*].”

And so, Paul takes one more verse from Isaiah and plants the seed.^{ix} That’s as far as we got last time. And now. I hope that you would hope, and plant seeds of hope, and then. Don’t be surprised when people get angry. And don’t get discouraged when you discover where these seeds grow. Next verse, verse 22, Paul talks about some of his hopes:

Romans 15:22-23a:

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.

²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions...

What a bizarre thing to say. Not everyone in Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece were Christian and definitely not mature Christians. What a bizarre thing to say, unless Paul actually believes that it isn’t his job to make things grow; it’s his job to plant the seed.^x

Romans 15:23-33:

I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸ When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. ³⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

It seems fairly clear that Paul wrote this letter to the Romans from Corinth in 56AD, just before he began his journey to Jerusalem, which is recorded by Luke, in Acts 20 and 21. He has the Romans pray that he would be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. But in Acts 21, Luke records that Paul is arrested in the temple having been accused of bringing gentiles into the holy place. So, did God answer their prayers, and did Paul’s hope put him to shame?

He had come bringing a large financial gift for his fellow Jews in Jerusalem, from whom he had often been estranged and with whom he longed for reconciliation. But in thirteen years, Jerusalem would be consumed by fire and Roman legions would plow the temple into the ground such that one stone would not be left standing on another. So, was his offering offered in vain, and did his hopes put him to shame?

In v. 24 he wrote “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.” But after Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and the Jews make an attempt on his life, in Acts 23, Luke records that Paul is imprisoned in Caesarea just north of Jerusalem for two years, until he finally appeals to Caesar in Acts 26. About 60AD, Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner and then lives under house arrest under the watch of a Roman soldier for at least two years, at which time the book of Acts must’ve been written. For there, in Acts 28, the account of Paul’s life, in Scripture, ends. According to the early Church Fathers, in 64AD Paul was beheaded under Emperor Nero, along with Peter who was crucified upside down. And most scholars seem to think that he never did make it to Spain.

“I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain,” wrote Paul. So, was Paul wrong to hope? Did he hope too much? Did he hope for the wrong things? Did his hopes put him to shame?

- Maybe you hoped that your marriage wouldn’t fail, & it did.
- Maybe you hoped that your son would be happy, & he took his own life.
- Maybe you hoped that your business would succeed, & it crashed.
- Maybe you hoped for a new Corvette, now your old, & you still don’t have one.
- Maybe you just hoped to get wasted, & you couldn’t even afford a bottle of beer.
- So, did you hope too much? Did you hope for the wrong thing? Did your hope put you to shame? Were you wrong to hope?

Let me remind you of what Paul has already told us about hope. In Romans 5 he wrote, “...we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame...” that’s the ESV, NIV and KJV. The RSV, NRSV, and NKJV translate it as “hope does not disappoint us...” Well hope sure does seem to disappoint me and put me to shame. And so, I’m scared to hope and even ashamed that I have hoped. And so I assume I’ve hoped too much and for the wrong thing.

Romans 5:5, “Hope does not put us to shame, [2] because God’s love has been poured into our hearts.” In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes, “Love hopes all things.” And, in Romans 13:10, he wrote, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” That means you not only can hope all things; you must hope all things, for love hopes all things. How could you hope for the wrong thing when Love hopes all things?

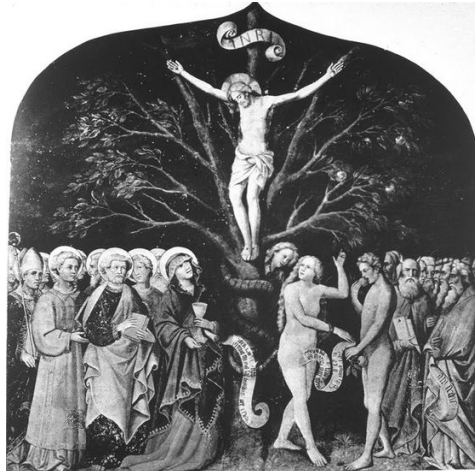
In all his letters Paul clearly teaches that God is the creator of all things. In 1 Timothy he writes, “Everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.” God creates everything and everything God creates is good, so that which is evil must be nothing but a lie. And so, you really can’t hope in evil, you can only hope in something that turns out to be nothing, which means you never actually hoped in that thing at all.

“Love hopes all things.” And in 1st Corinthians 3:21 Paul writes, “All things are yours and you are Christ’s and Christ’s is God.” So, the beer is yours; the Corvette is yours; the business is yours; your son is yours; the marriage is yours; your new self is yours; all things are yours. You know there are people, that relatively speaking, do seem to actually have all things—in their grasp, they possess them—people that have all things, and yet all things seem to have them, and they enjoy very few of those things and often despair of life itself. “Love hopes all things” and “All things are yours,” writes Paul. And in Ephesians Paul writes, “There is one hope.”

Crazy huh? But if it’s true, then all things are really one thing, and God wants you to hope in all things, with one hope, all the time. Maybe all things really are yours, but you haven’t yet learned to hope all things, and so cannot enjoy all things in the One Hope. He just wrote, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy...” Wouldn’t that be the eternal fulfillment of every possible hope? ^{xi} God, Our Father, seems to be aiming for maximum hope AND maximum joy.

In Romans 5, Paul wrote, “Hope will not disappoint us,” but it sure seems to disappoint me. In Romans 8, Paul wrote, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to [decay] and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Then he explains that all creation is giving birth... all temporality is giving birth to eternity, when and where we each become who we truly are. Verse 24, “For in this hope 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.” If we don’t wait with patience, perhaps it’s not hope. If we are disappointed or ashamed, perhaps we haven’t been hoping, we’ve only been craving, wantonly craving, what is already ours. If you hope to create yourself, save yourself, and justify yourself, you’re hoping in nothing but a lie (you can’t create yourself, philosophically it’s not a “thing”) and your hope isn’t actually hope, but instead a prison of shame—what the old English translations call “wantonness.”

The sheep that leaves the Shepherd to find the Grass is wanton. But the sheep that follows the Shepherd does not “want.”^{xii} And yet, that sheep hopes in the Shepherd for the grass and all Good things. Hope is surrendered desire, but it’s still desire; it’s actually an even greater desire—it’s a desire so big and so beautiful that you know, that you yourself, cannot fulfill the desire but must trust in another to fulfill it. So, if you think you can fulfill it, you’re definitely not hoping all things, or the one thing, or even hoping at all; you’re not hoping, just taking; actually, you’ve crucified hope.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

Solomon wrote “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a coming desire is a tree of life.”^{xiii} You know all hope begins as a desire that’s been deferred, otherwise we would never learn to hope—Who hopes for what he sees? And if the desire hasn’t been deferred, we couldn’t wait for it with patience. So maybe God doesn’t defer hope, but we defer hope by seizing control of what we desire—by taking what we desire, which crucifies hope and makes it impossible for us to enjoy what we desire, even if we get it, for it’s dead to us.

Look at the tree in the middle of the garden and think it through.

- Christ crucified is a hope deferred; Christ risen from the dead is a coming desire.
- Sin is a hope deferred; righteousness is a coming desire.
- Old Jerusalem is a hope deferred; the New Jerusalem, containing the tree of life and coming down from heaven, is a coming desire
- The sixth day of creation is the story of hope deferred; but the seventh day, God’s sabbath rest, when all is good, and it is finished, is the coming desire.
- Your ego is a hope deferred—it’s the self that you think you should be but are unable to make yourself, the self in which you’re trapped—your old man is a hope deferred; but Christ in you is the coming desire.
- Taking fruit from the tree is hope deferred (we took our desire and cannot enjoy any desire); but receiving the fruit from the tree is receiving a Seed, which having died in you, rises in you, and grows into all that anyone could ever desire: the tree of life.

It was in Romans Chapter four that Paul began talking about hope. He informed us that hope came to Abraham as a seed. Abraham “Hoped against Hope,”^{xiv} for Abraham would inherit the Cosmos.^{xv} Abraham would inherit the cosmos, but at first, he learned to hope in just one seed, and only after he tried to manufacture that seed. And once he received the seed, he was asked to sacrifice the seed on Mt. Moriah before God gave the Seed back and all things with him—the cosmos.

You know Paul probably didn’t make it to Spain, and yet if you go to Spain today, 2000 years later, he is absolutely everywhere and we’re studying his words right here, right now. And Paul was rejected by Jerusalem in 57 AD, but he’s there now, everyone adores him, and he’ll never

ever leave, but all creation will enter. And Paul actually has been delivered from the unbelievers, for God has used Paul to deliver the unbelievers from themselves. So Paul's hopes were never too big and only too small. And you'll get your Corvette and all the beer you want, and you'll be forever intoxicated with the very spirit of the living God. You'll get your son back and you will get your ex back whether you want to get him or her back right now, you'll be wed to Christ and all things with him. And right now, you can rejoice in this hope; Paul's most hopeful and happy letters—Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians—were written from prison in Rome. You can't hope too much, but you always hope too little, until that day that you've learned to enjoy all things—And so right now, hope is growing in you. And hope can hurt—that's how it feels when it grows. Hope is faith for the journey and the ability to enjoy it when you arrive. Hope is space in you for the Kingdom of God.

If you've seen our [Downside Up Videos](#), you know that when my children were little, they had a great hope, in [a magic kingdom](#), and a whole new world, called Disney World. Twenty-five years ago, a friend gave us tickets and a week at a condo at the Disney Resort. And I earnestly wanted to go. Not because I loved Disneyland or Disneyworld, but because I just loved giving my kids joy—I mean it's hard to explain, but when you're a dad, nothing rocks your boat quite like utterly rocking your kid's boat, but that's more complicated than it would seem at first.

So anyway, I cherished the thought of the big reveal, when they'd erupt in joy and shower me with kisses. With four little kids I knew we couldn't afford to fly, but I figured that we could drive in our blue minivan. I also knew that I couldn't tell the kids until it was close to the day of our departure; I knew that at 3, 6, 8, and 9, they just wouldn't be able to handle the expectation, anticipation, and craven, wanton, rabid desire.

If you're a parent you know that all the worst family fights seem to happen around Christmas, when all the biggest hopes turn into wanton expectations, such that Christmas morning isn't an eruption of joy and kisses, but a hell of bickering, resentment, and then, insecurity and shame. One year my daughter Elizabeth wanted a punching bag for Christmas, and I thought "Hey I'd like a punching bag; I bet the other kids would like a punching bag; punching bags don't wear out, and if I get the bag for everyone, we'll have more money to get Elizabeth more stuff all for herself." Elizabeth wanted a punching bag, but when she got a punching bag and realized it wasn't her own private punching bag, everybody started punching each other so to speak, and no one punched the punching bag.^{xvi} So, I realized that I couldn't tell them too soon, but I longed for them to hope. I plotted our course and realized we'd be passing through Junction City Kansas, the town in which I was born. So, when they pressed me about vacation, "Where are we going Daddy?" I said, "We're going to Junction City." They said, "What's in Junction City?" I said, "Um stuff—you know bowling allies, swimming pools, and the house I lived in when I was a little boy." And they said "Wow, we're going to Junction City."

One day I took the kids to lunch at McDonald's and the Happy Meal Toy had something to do with Disneyworld's Animal Kingdom. Elizabeth was staring longingly at her happy meal toy when I said, "Elizabeth what's that?" She said something like, "Dad it's so cool, this is an animal from Disney Animal Kingdom." I said "Wow, what's that?" She said, "Oh Daddy Disney World is this amazing place, but it's far away in a place called Orlando—we could never afford to go there." I almost burst, but I said, "Well we're gonna' have a good vacation. Trust me. We're

going to Junction City.” And we were, it just that it wasn’t the only place that we were going. I had called ahead and arranged for the big reveal. The pastor of First Presbyterian would give us a tour of my dad’s old church and the house I lived in when I was a little boy, and then we’d sit on the front steps, have a pre-arranged dialogue, and I’d announce the Good News. Then, we’d break out the Mouseketeer hats and crown the children with Micky Mouse ears, as they erupted in ecstatic joy, covered me in kisses, and we caught it all on film.

Home video plays of the Hiatt children sitting on the steps of First Presbyterian church in Junction City, Kansas. Peter and the pastor are talking with the kids, preparing for the big reveal.

Peter Yeah, we can find a hotel but, after that, what else is there to do?

Coleman Play on the playground!

Peter Yeah, you know what you guys?

Elisabeth We could go roller blading, we brought our roller blades.

Peter We’ve pretty much seen everything.

Pastor There’s a little miniature golf place.

Kids Ooohhh.

Becky The bowling alley

Pastor ...bowling alley, roller skating...

Peter We have a bowling alley at home.

Pastor Yeah, you might as well go home to do that. It’d be hot.

Elisabeth Roller skating rink!

Peter We can roller skate at home too.

Elisabeth I know.

Peter Well, what else could we do?

Coleman Let’s play on the playground!

Peter No, we’ve got playgrounds at home.

Becky We could play here.

Peter Hey, what’s to the east if we stayed on interstate 70 and just kept driving, where would we go?

Pastor Well, keep on going far enough and you’d get to the other side of the United States, the east side. You can take—if you want to get to where it’s hotter—you can then take the interstates angling down. I don’t know, go to Florida.

Elisabeth I think it’s hot enough here.

Pastor It’s hot enough here?

Peter How far is Florida?

Pastor Oh, let’s see, about 1500 miles.

Peter 1500? What do they have in Florida?

Pastor I don’t know. Do you know anything that’s in Florida (to the kids)?

Jonathan Alligators?

Pastor Yeah.

Elisabeth Um, I wonder...

Becky Crocodiles.

Pastor Crocodiles. Anything to do to play there?

Elisabeth Um, Disneyworld?

Pastor Yeah.

Peter Oh hey, you wanna’ go to Disneyworld?

Coleman I’d rather be here.

Peter What?

Susan You’d rather be here? Jon, do you want to go to Disneyworld?

Jonathan I’ll think about that one.

At that point I shut off the camera, and helped Susan pass out the Mouseketeer hats, hoping my children would embrace the absolute wonder of the incredibly good news which I had just shared with them.

The home video continues with the kids adorned in Mickey Mouse ears.

Peter Yeah, I'm totally serious. We're driving two more days to Disneyworld and then we're gonna' go to the beach.

Elizabeth How many days are we staying here (in a distressed tone)?

At that point I think I just shut off the camera in disgust and said, "We're going to Disney World. Yahoo! Let's Get in the Van." Coleman said "Shoot! I wanted to go to the park." And Becky said, "I don't want to get in the van." Then I said, "JUST GET IN THE VAN!" I was embarrassed. Susan was embarrassed. We thought the pastor must think we had the most spoiled kids in the world. I had just strapped them all in and was walking back around the van, when it felt like God whispered in my soul, "Now do you understand what it's like to be me? You see their hopes weren't too big, but too little. Junction City was in their grasp, under their control, but the Magic kingdom was still a painful van ride away. "Now do you understand what it's like to be me—to be your Daddy? Peter your hopes are not too big, they're far too small?" God calls me to hope, I seize control of the hope, crucify the hope, by turning it into my want, and then when I don't get what I want, I give into despair and refuse to hope at all. I hang on to Junction City and refuse to get in the Van. I probably thought I learned my lesson that day, but I'll be learning that lesson until the day I die, the day I arrive.

A couple of months ago, Susan walked into my office and said, "I was praying for you, and I think I heard the Lord say, 'Tell Peter to read 1st Thessalonians 3, and tell him not to be discouraged.'" I read it, got discouraged, then hurt, and then just angry. I write these things down in my old Bible; it was the fifth time in eleven years that God told me to read 1st Thessalonians 3, and twice 1st Thessalonians 2, and once just the whole thing. In 1st Thessalonians 2, Paul writes to the Thessalonians recounting how he was torn away from them by religious folks who hated the Gospel of Grace; He writes about how much it hurt him, for they were his "joy and crown." In 1st Thessalonians 3 He goes on and on about how thrilled he is by news from Timothy that the Thessalonians still long for him as he longs for them, and he is so encouraged to know that his labor was not in vain.

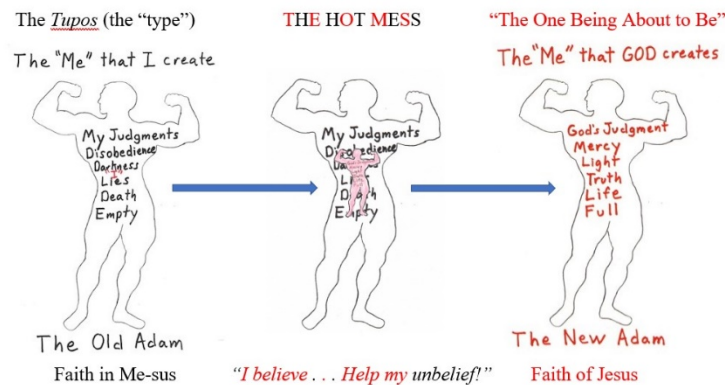
As I've been sharing, 15 years ago, I was removed from the church I had pastored for 15 years without even an opportunity to say goodbye—removed for hoping too much in the power of God's Grace. I said to my friend Andrew, "I don't think I'm just feeling sorry for myself. I sincerely don't understand why God keeps poking me in my deepest wound. I don't think those people long for me, as I have longed for them. I've got no news from Timothy and it feels like all that labor was in vain. I've tried to let it go, and God won't let it go—why does he keep rubbing it in my face?" I went for a long bike ride that day, and remembered what God had told me through Jeremiah, "They will turn to you; but you will not turn to them."^{xvii} I knew what he meant, I hadn't been wrong to hope all things, and I couldn't renounce my hope in an effort to resurrect my past—I couldn't fix this. But that didn't mean I couldn't hope that God would do the fixing.^{xviii} And then it hit me like a ton of bricks: I really missed all those people. And I'd given up hope for restored relationships with all those people, for it just hurt too much to hope. It

hurt too much to hope because I wasn't hoping in Jesus. I was hoping in me-sus, which isn't hope; it's the edge of hell.

And then I thought of Paul's letter to Philemon, "Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever not as a slave, but as a brother."^{xix} You know as a pastor, it's easy to see people as part of your kingdom, and then you really don't see people, and you don't enjoy people. And then I realized, I'm going to get all those people back—but I can't win them back as if they were my creation, Jesus will win them back for we are all his creation. And when I get them back, I will enjoy them as I've never enjoyed them before—not as slaves to my ego, but brothers in my soul—for God has expanded my soul with faith in Love, which is Hope. Hope creates space for all things filled with Love.

In Hebrews 12, Paul, or someone very close to Paul wrote "Faith is the hypostasis, the substance, of things hoped for." We all hope for Love and God is Love. So, faith is like a seed from God planted in the soil of your soul, and hope is faith for the journey home.

- Hope is faith for the distances from our house through Junction City and on to the Magic Kingdom.
- Hope is faith for the distance from all our broken churches and all our broken relationships on to the communion that is the Kingdom of God.
- Hope is faith for the distance from your old man to your new man, which is who it is that you truly are, and we truly are—the Body of Christ.
- Hope is the courage to lose yourself that you might find yourself and thoroughly enjoy yourself, and everyone else, in the Kingdom of God.



Hope is faith for this journey. From your old man to your new man. And right now, you are in between. Do you see that if you try to create yourself, save yourself and justify yourself you only make a false self, an imitation Christ, an antichrist, an arrogant ego in which your true self is imprisoned?

The shadows in the darkness wouldn't look up to the Light, for the Revelation of Jesus is the death of Me-sus, our kingdom of dirt. And the shadows in the darkness are not the only undead

dead. According to Paul we are all the undead dead, until we die with Christ, rise with Christ, stand up and start walking toward the door. Me-sus is the prison in which you have been trapped. But if by faith you Hope in Love, the shape of Me-sus, becomes the Revelation of Jesus; your own particular sorrow, becomes your own particular joy, for where sin increased, Grace has abounded all the more. And when you share your joy, you experience all joy, everyone's joy. And that's why I hope that you would hope and plant seeds of Hope. Only Hope looks up, stands up, and enters. And only Hope can experience the fulness of Joy.

When we did arrive in Florida, it happened several times, we'd be standing in line to ride Space Mountain (one more time) or eating those big turkey legs they called alien legs or walking down the beach at night to see sea turtles lay their eggs in the sand. One of the kids would stop, look up at me with huge eyes and say, "Daddy, I can't believe I wanted to stay in Junction City. I love you!"

You see, faith in Love is what makes the Magic Kingdom magic. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and, whether you know it or not, you only hope for Love, God is Love, and God is filling all things^{xx}—including Junction City and you. This is the mystery hidden for ages and generations, Christ in you, the hope of Glory. So, of course, in this Hope we (you) are saved.

Communion

So, on the night Hope was betrayed, he took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you. Take and eat and do it in remembrance of me." And in the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you. And do it in remembrance of me."

This is the Seed. [Peter holds up a piece of bread dipped in wine and eats it.] Plant it in the field (your kingdom of dirt). And then plant it in everyone you meet, for he has made you his tree of life. Believe the Gospel, amen.

[As Peter breaks the bread and pours the wine into the chalices, Rick, from the congregation—a member dating back to the Lookout Mountain days—shouts out to Peter, and says "Peter, we love you. Our hope is that your hope comes true. We love you. Thank you."] Thank you, Rick. And that's the one hope—our hope. And Paul said this, "rejoice in that hope because hope will not disappoint us." Amen?

Prayer

So, Lord God, I pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, we would let the streets resound with singing. What a wild thought to think—we're the ones not letting it happen because we think we are salvation, when in fact, Lord God, you are salvation. We thank you that that's your name—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and we thank you that you are successful. And so, Lord God, we hope a bit. And we invite you to expand our hope, even though the process hurts, because we're beginning to see that you are Good. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Benediction

And Rick, I wanna' say thanks for what you said. The funny thing is, I don't know if I could even receive that always in the past. And I want to say too that, I talk about my "stuff" because it's the illustration that is most available to me. It's my dirt, my brokenness. But I hope you realize that, in this room, there are people dealing with stuff far, far worse than what I've experienced. And I'm not the only one who has hopes that seem to have to be surrendered. I know some of your stories—you have hopes that have been shattered, dreams that haven't happened—but I want you to keep hoping. Because actually, the hope wasn't shattered. It's me—sus that's getting shattered and the hope is only growing, and you cannot hope too much. And, in the end, you cannot even hope for the wrong thing, because God's the creator of all things and you're destined to receive all things. And so, may you hope.

People often wonder: why are we here? What is this all about? Why all the death, decay, and destruction? Why the suffering? I don't think we can answer fully, but if you stop and think about it, this world does seem like it would be the perfect location for growing a bumper crop of hope. So, in Jesus' name, hope and keep hoping and it will not fail, because he will not fail. Our God in Heaven has made himself hope. In his name, believe the Gospel, amen.

And so, Lord God, we bless your name. I was watching South Park last week. They were at church and the priest said something like, "We bless your name." And then all the people, in response to the liturgy, said, "Oh yep, it's a really great name." God, we do bless your name. Not because Jesus has a ring to it but because we know what it means. And God, if we don't know what it means, I pray that you would tell us right now. It's in your name that we pray, amen.

Message

Hey there! I haven't seen you since last year. In case you didn't notice I was missing the last two weekends, partying here and in Seattle with my kids. And in case you forgot, one month ago and before Christmas, we were preaching through Romans—didn't make it all the way through, but at least we made it to the beginning of Paul's closing remarks. We've been preaching through Romans for over a year, so it's easy to forget things and tempting to think that all of this is very complicated. In a way it is, and yet in another way, it's really not.

It's all summed up in Romans 11:32 "God consigned all to disobedience (that is death and evil), that he may have mercy on all (that's the good and the Life)."^{xxi} And so just as the prophets say, Romans 14:11 "As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God." Paul is quoting Isaiah, who makes it clear that God is promising to save (45:22) and swearing an oath that he will—Isaiah 45:23 "by myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a Word that shall not turn back, 'to me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear allegiance.'" So, God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all and that Mercy comes to us as a Word, that is a Seed—a Word that God swears by

and a Word that is also himself “by myself, I have sworn.”^{xxii} Another way to say all of that is to simply say “God is Salvation.” And, of course, that forms a name, and the name is *Yeshua*, that is, Jesus. In John 17, Jesus reveals that he has the same name as his Father.

The book of Romans is as simple as Jesus—A little child can know Jesus. A little child can hope in Jesus while the rest of us really struggle.

Romans 15:4:

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

That means that not only the scriptures promising salvation, but all those terrifying scriptures describing death and destruction, were all written down to give us hope. At first that makes no sense, but if you think about it, it makes all the sense in the world. If you ignore the painful passages and pretend that God would never allow you to suffer, you can gain some followers, but in a few years, you’ll lose hope. This world is full of death and destruction; there’s no way around it. But think about it: Isn’t that the exact location in which hope grows?

Romans 15:8-9a:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised. [Literally translated: “Christ became a minister of circumcision to show God’s truthfulness”], **in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,⁹ and [moreover] that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.**

So, Paul isn’t simply saying that Christ became a minister to the circumcised (that’s the Jews) and the uncircumcised (that’s the Gentiles). He’s saying that through Christ, just as God promised to the patriarchs, God circumcises hearts and turns Gentiles into Jews.

Romans 15:9b:

“Therefore, I will praise you ~~among~~ (*en*: literally “in”) the Gentiles and sing to your name. (2 Sam. 22:50, Psalm 18:49)”

David wrote that, but the King of the Jews is singing that, in the Gentiles. It’s just as Paul writes to the Colossians: “To the saints (that is you) God chose to make known how great ~~among~~ (*en*: literally “in”) the Gentiles is this mystery which is Christ in [y’all].”

Romans 15:10:

And again, it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people (Deut. 32:43).”

Notice that Paul is quoting Scripture to give the Romans Hope.

Romans 15:11-13:

And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles [not “some Gentiles,” “all you Gentiles”], and let all the peoples extol him (Psalm 117:1).”¹² And again Isaiah (11:1,10) says, “The root of Jesse will come. [Jesse is David’s Father, so the root of Jesse is the Root of David. “I am the root and the seed of David,” says Jesus in the

Revelation.^{xxiii} So, the root is also a seed; actually “The Eternal Seed.”] **“The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.”** ¹³ **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 literally, abound in, exceed all measures, overflow with hope.**

And as I mentioned last time, 15 years ago, I was defrocked, and some of you were “excommunicated” with me, for having too much hope. At the time I was just saying that I hoped “every knee would bow, and every tongue give praise,” for God would have “mercy on all.” And the chairman of the committee said, “Peter, you can hope it as long as you confess that it’s impossible.” It’s still amazing to me, that I was defrocked for too much hope, and yet at the same time, I must admit, hope can be utterly terrifying, and almost impossible to talk about, although we all have an idea as to what it is. As I prayed about all of this, this week, I kept thinking of this picture:



I kept thinking of a Nebraska corn field in Winter. My Grandpa Ralph was a farmer in Nebraska, and a couple of times around Christmas we went back to the farm—and it looked like death. There’s nothing quite as barren, bleak, and desolate as a Nebraska corn field in January, I kept thinking of this picture AND this picture:



Usually, we'd go to the farm in July or August and the very same field would look like this. Grandpa grew feed corn and sweet corn—In August, you could walk through the exact same field—and it was a banquet of life, abundant Life. As a kid, the corn was at eye level; you could walk through the field and chow down on all the sweet corn you desired—I actually liked it better raw than cooked; you could eat and eat and eat and not even make a dent in Grandpa's harvest.

You know I think that corn in August was all that much sweeter, because we had visited the farm nine months before in mid-winter. Well, to understand Hope, you have to experience both pictures. Hope is knowledge of Life and death at the same time. Hope is literally the knowledge of Good and evil.

Folks that have never suffered evil, don't hope for the Good, in fact one could argue that they don't even know what it is. And now here's a wild thought: According to Paul in Romans 8:20, God hopes (Which is an utterly fascinating thought, for it implies suffering) God hopes for as Paul writes, "God consigned all creation to futility in Hope."

Hope requires knowledge of Good and evil. And yet the knowledge of evil isn't evil I mean once you gained the knowledge of evil, you might be forever filled with the Good. Evil is like an empty void, It's the not Good, yet to be filled with the Good. Evil is temporal; it comes to an end, but the Good is the End. Hope grows in space and time, but is, itself, eternal—"hope abides."^{xxiv} We experience it here as an empty field, but we will know it forever as Eternal Life—the very presence of God.



So anyway, I was saying that Hope is knowledge of both pictures. Ignorant people will sometimes say, “If you hope that all will be saved, you’re not taking evil seriously, hell seriously, and salvation seriously.” Well, I think I’ve been to hell a bit, praying for a few friends who were trapped there, in bondage to demons and satan. And it was there in those places, and at those times, that I learned to hope. It was there that I realized that evil is a problem far too great for me. It was there that I learned to hope NOT in me, or other people, or institutions, or books, policies, programs, and procedures, but to hope in God and his Word—his living Word Jesus.

Hope is knowledge of both pictures, the evil and the Good; but not just knowledge of those things, but also the way you get from one to the other. You see, there’s only one Way and Hope is the Way; Jesus is the Way. “In this hope”—that creation (and we are creation) will be set free from futility— “In this hope, we are saved” wrote Paul in Romans 8. To hope in yourself and your judgment isn’t hope; it’s what the Scripture refers to as “wantonness”—wantonness is seizing control of the thing, or the things, that you desire.^{xxv}

The Sheep that leaves the Shepherd to find the Grass is wanton. But the Sheep that follows the Shepherd does not “want.”^{xxvi} And yet, that Sheep hopes in the Shepherd for grass and all good things. Hope is surrendered desire, but it’s still desire; it’s actually an even greater desire—it’s a desire so big and so beautiful that you know that you, yourself, cannot fulfill it. And you see, that’s what makes hope so painful, and apparently dangerous. Surrendering control always feels like death, and maybe it is.

My flesh loves control. Institutions love control. And I suspect that’s why I was defrocked for too much hope. Maximum hope is minimum control, and that is more than a bit terrifying for everyone, particularly for those in control. And Paul is talking about Maximum Hope—hope, even for those who have no hope. It’s hope that everyone will hope “all things:” Maximum Hope. And in Romans 5, Paul told us, “Hope does not disappoint us.”^{xxvii} So, hope isn’t just a wish; It’s the presence of the Future.

Romans 12: “The Root of Jesse will come...[and] in him the Gentiles will hope.” Paul keeps mentioning hope and “gentiles.” I once read that Hitler was the first to define “the Jews” as a race and maybe there’s some truth to that but I doubt that the first was Hitler.

The Jews started as a race—the children of Judah—but Paul and all of Scripture define Judaism as a faith, and the sign of that faith is circumcision.

- In Romans 2 Paul told us that one is a Jew inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart.
- In Romans 11 Gentiles are grafted into the family tree, for we were all circumcised in Jesus, our husband, at the cross.
- In Exodus 12:48 God tells the Israelites that if a foreigner would live with them and desire to eat the Passover, “let him be circumcised and he will be as a native [*ezrah*].” That’s a Jew.
- In Ephesians Paul refers to the Ephesians as “Gentiles in the flesh,” but at the end of the letter he tells them to not live as “the Gentiles.” So, what does Paul really mean by “Gentile,” except for one who doesn’t fully hope in the God of Israel, one who doesn’t believe.

It is my experience that Christians often think that the book of Romans is about ending racism between Jews and Gentiles, and then we use it to propose a far more insidious form of racism, and insurmountable division, between those that are destined to believe, and those that can’t believe, between those that God loves and those that God doesn’t love, between those that are good and those that are evil, between those that hope and those that cannot hope and must be endlessly tortured—the Nazi’s are lightweights next to that. When we read “gentile,” I think we should hear “unbeliever.” So how do the faithless get faith? How do the hopeless hope? How do the unsaved get saved?

Verse 12: “The root of Jesse (which is also the Seed), will come. Verse 13: “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 15:14:

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

Paul just told Romans, whom he hadn’t met, that they contained all knowledge. So, Paul is lying or maybe Paul actually believes what he says in other places, like 1 Corinthians 3:8, “You are God’s field.”^{xxviii} You know a field of dirt contains no knowledge, until, into that field, someone drops a seed. I’ve always remembered a phrase that I once heard in a sermon^{xxix}—a word contains the future in its bosom, like a seed. In every seed there is DNA—all the knowledge necessary to turn dirt into a life, like the life that is a tree.

The biggest trees in my neighborhood—ancient cottonwoods—started as the tiniest seeds, seeds you wouldn’t even notice in the soil of your backyard.



This is my life tree. It's about fifty years old and I've had to cut it back numerous times in order to keep it in my house. It's a schefflera tree that I got from my grandpa when I was in Junior high. Over the years I keep having to add dirt to this pot, because the tree mixes the dirt with light and turns it into life; it's eating the dirt. If there's a seed that turns dirt into eternal life, then a day will come when everything will be life, and death will be no more. Well, Paul believes that you are a field. And Paul also believes that Jesus is the Seed. "In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," writes Paul.^{xxx}

Romans 15:14b-16:

[You are] filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister (*leitourgos*^{xxxii}: like a priest in the temple) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles in the priestly service of (making a sacrifice of) the gospel of God^{xxxiii}, so that the offering^{xxxiv} of the Gentiles^{xxxv} may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul seems to be saying that, when he preaches the Gospel, he is sacrificing the Word like a priest in the temple, or a farmer dropping a seed into the soil—A sacrifice, so that hopeless unbelievers would then sacrifice themselves^{xxxvi} in hope; in other words, that they would love as they have been loved.

Romans 15:17:

In Christ Jesus, then, I have ~~reason to be proud of my work for~~ [literally: "the boast unto"] God.

In Chapter 3 Paul wrote "what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded." So, you have no reason to boast in the work of Me-sus, but you must boast in the work of Jesus in and through you, which is the true you.

Romans 15:18-19a:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience...(that's "the obedience of faith," as he told us at the start of Romans.^{xxxvi}) (So, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring [the unbelievers to belief, the unfaithful to faith, the hopeless to hope—how?])—**by word (*logos*) and deed (*ergon*: work) [actually, a word incarnate in deed],¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.**

Signs and wonders produce hope, but religious folks make two fatal mistakes in regard to signs and wonders that crucify hope. We either:

1. Try to control signs and wonders, in which case their no longer wonder-full and no longer signs pointing to God but pointing to us. OR
2. Frustrated that we can't control signs and wonders, we tell folks that signs and wonders don't happen at all.

In my experience, they most definitely happen, and yet they're incredibly frustrating because I can't just make them happen. I think that's because the point is hope in God and not in me and not a little hope—but maximum hope. God wants you to hope, and not only hope that he would heal your back, but that he would heal all creation and even your soul, even your enemy's soul. If you only hope for yourself, you're hoping yourself right on to the outer darkness where you will weep and gnash your teeth alone.

Romans 15:19b-20:

...by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum [that's like Croatia] I have fulfilled^{xxxvii} the ministry of the gospel of Christ [*euangelion*: Good News];²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition [*Philotimeomai*: labor of love] to preach the gospel [*euangelizo*: evangelize, announce Good News], not where Christ has already been named...

I love how he says that, as if Christ is absolutely everywhere, in Athens, in Rome, and in your unbelieving neighbor—but just waiting to be named. The Word is everywhere, like a seed lying dormant in the soil. Or perhaps, an egg in a womb, waiting to be fertilized by a seed from you.

And so, the Word is in your neighbor—just as Paul told us in chapter 10—the Word is in your neighbor, waiting to be named by the Word spoken through you, when you proclaim "Jesus." That's his name. It's then, that the Word rises from the tomb and begins to grow as Faith, Hope and Love in your neighbor.

Romans 15:20-21a:

I make it my ambition [*Philotimeomai*: labor of love] to preach the gospel [*euangelizo*: evangelize, announce Good News], not where Christ has already been named [Perhaps Christ is waiting to be named in every person you meet? Perhaps your called to boldly go where no man has gone before.]²¹ but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see...."

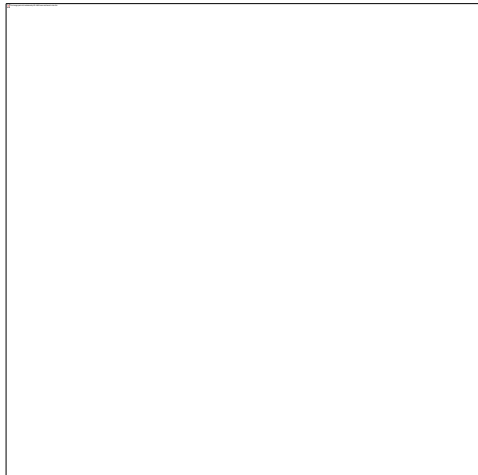
Has anyone ever told you that those who haven't been told and haven't heard are damned so as to never see and never understand? Scripture says:

Romans 15:21b:

“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand [*suniem*].”

Now logically, “Those” would at least include everyone not born before Paul wrote this letter or even before Isaiah prophesied these words. They will understand [*suniem*]; it's a fascinating word study; it's a word that Paul only uses in one other location in Romans 3:10 “As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands [*suniem*].’”

Suniem is a cognate in Greek: *sun* is “with” and *hiemi* “to send.” It means “to bring together.” It is that moment when all the facts come together revealing the meaning, the moment when all the experiences add up to a plot. It is the moment when all the elements—carbon, calcium, oxygen—come together and become a living person and you meet him.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

You know you could look at the fruit hanging on this tree and think it's like a set of facts that you could take, dissect, utilize, and control—but it would be dead, and you would be dead; you would have gained knowledge of evil. Or you could look at the fruit on this tree, and see that He is the Life, then all those facts would come together in a person, who is your husband, and you would meet him, and know him for he would know you. That's *suniem*. You would “understand.”^{xxxviii}

When Jesus told the parable of the soils, he quoted Isaiah 6 saying, “This is why I speak to them in parables because (or “so that”^{xxxix}) seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand (*suniem*).”^{xl} Why would Jesus speak so that they wouldn't hear, except so that when they do understand, they would also know that understanding itself is the miracle, like a seed coming to life having been buried in the soil, like faith by grace and this not of ourselves, only faith understands.

Isaiah 6:13 ...The holy seed is its stump.

Isaiah 11:1 The root of Jesse will come...
The wolf will dwell with the lamb... For the earth shall be full of
the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:10 ...in him will the gentiles hope.

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him who brings
good news, ...who publishes salvation [*yashuwah*].

Isaiah 52:15 So shall he sprinkle many nations [*goyim*: gentiles]; Kings shall
shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been
told them they see, and that which they have not heard they
understand.

“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” That’s Isaiah 52:15 and Paul just quoted Isaiah 11:1 and 10. Verse 1 was “The root of Jesse will come...” and verse 10, “in him will the gentiles hope.”^{xli} In between those verses Isaiah prophesies the most incredible hope. “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, etc., etc.” That is, creation will stop devouring itself, and all will be made new. “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of *Yahweh*, as the waters cover the sea.” Because the root of Jesse, the Seed, has come.

In Isaiah 6,^{xlii} Isaiah is instructed by God to prophesy Israel down to utter destruction, until all that remains is a stump. Then God says, “the holy seed is it’s substance; it’s stump.” It’s as if Israel is this tree, or false tree, which grew from a seed—but grew in the wrong way—and God has Isaiah chop it down to a stump. But from the stump, from the root of Jesse, grows a new tree in exactly the same spot (I bet it’s the middle of the garden). In this tree is eternal life.^{xliii} And hopefully all of that sounds familiar to you, Adam.

In Isaiah 52 Isaiah prophesies “How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him who brings good news... who publishes salvation [*yashuwah*].” In Hebrew “salvation” is pronounced “*yashuah*,” which sounds just like the name “*Yeshua*,” which literally means “God is Salvation,” and in English is pronounced Jesus.^{xliv}

Isaiah 52:7 “How beautiful are the feet of him, who publishes Jesus.” Isaiah 52:15 “So shall he sprinkle many nations (*goyim*: that is gentiles)” He will sprinkle blood (*nazah*) like the priests that sprinkle the blood of sacrifice upon the people of Israel. Isaiah continues “kings shall shut their mouths because of him for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.”

They see and understand Jesus, who is the Seed, who is the Word that you know and can speak. We do speak the Word, but we also don’t speak the Word. Why don’t we speak the Word; why don’t we publish the Word; why don’t we plant the Seed all the time? Do you know why my grandpa planted the Seed? Hope. He hoped in the Seed.

So, why don’t we preach the Word?

Why we don't preach the Word:

1. Maybe we don't hope in the Word.
2. Maybe we don't understand it.
3. Maybe we don't want to get messy.
4. Maybe we think, "I can't make it work."
5. . . . It is a sacrifice.
6. Maybe we don't know that the Word is a seed.
7. Maybe we don't know that God has made himself the Seed; God is Good.

1. Maybe we don't hope in the Word, and what is the Word?

"God is salvation" period. "God is Salvation" regardless of you. It's God's decision, not yours. So, we don't "preach to a decision;" we preach THE DECISION that changes the world. It's not the dirt that transforms the Seed, but the Seed that transforms the dirt—you, ignorant dirt bag named Adam

People say, "If you hope that God will save all, you won't preach the Word." But it was because Grandpa hoped in the seed, that he planted the seed. He never said, "I didn't plant the seed, for I had too much hope in the seed." Now, if he hadn't planted the seed, the field would lay fallow until he did, but the seed would still be the seed. And the seed we sow doesn't change; it is "the same yesterday, today, and forever;" it is eternal.^{xlv}

2. Maybe we don't understand it?

You know I never remember my grandpa coming in from the field weeping to my Grandma, saying "Ivy, I couldn't plant the seed because I just don't understand the seed and I sure as hell can't explain it. I'm inadequate." You know, no one can explain a seed, and yet we can begin to understand a seed, if we plant it, a little child can plant a seed. You don't have to know "how God saves" to announce, "God is salvation." People will say, "Peter I love what you say, but I don't know how to say it." Yes, you do; just say "God is Salvation" or "Jesus."

3. Maybe we don't want to get messy.

If you preach Jesus, you will have to get honest, and go to some desolate, painful, broken, and dirty places—like a Nebraska field in mid-winter. But you know I never remember Grandpa coming in from the field and saying "Ivy, I couldn't plant the seed, because there was just too much dirt, and manure, and it was, like, all broken up." How stupid is it to think, "There's no hope for them, for 'those people;' they're too dirty, too full of Crap, too broken—they're like a fertilized field, that's just been plowed, and so there's no point in planting the Seed."

4. Maybe we think "I can't make it work."

You know that's the temptation of religion, we come to think we can make it work, so if you just pray this prayer, take this class, follow this program, we can make it work. But when we build a factory in the field and make it work, we don't make people, we make false people and we don't grow fruit, we manufacture fake fruit. It will draw a crowd, but it won't raise the dead, or grow faith, hope, and love.

I never remember grandpa coming in from the field and saying, "I didn't plant the seed, because for the life of me, I don't know how to make it work." Listen closely: You can't make Jesus work; just plant the seed and he will work you and the dirtbags around you. But you will have to wait, patiently. Grandpa never dug up the seed to see if it was working, because then it wouldn't work. You can't make the Word work, and if you act like you can make it work, you just testify that God is not salvation, and you are salvation, and so crucify the Word, and yet, like I said, it cannot be stopped; it will rise from the dead; it's a seed.

5. Maybe we don't preach the word because well, it is a sacrifice.

So, if you preach Jesus, you'll sacrifice Me-sus, and probably think it's Jesus... and in a way it is—he dies with you and rises with you. And this is the crazy thing about planting seeds, it's not seizing control, but surrendering control of the very thing you desire. A kernel of corn is a kernel of food... or a new creation and a world of food if you plant it. "Unless a kernel falls into the earth and it dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit," said Jesus, the Seed.

6. Maybe we don't hope in the Word and know that the Word is Hope.

In other words, we don't believe that the Word is seed and that we come from that seed, so even our decision to plant the seed is the work of the Word. We don't believe the Word is a Seed and so, we blame the dirt and don't plant the Seed.

For 1500 years most of the institutional church has put their hope in the dirt and so stopped scattering the seed. We've blamed the dirt and kept the seed to ourselves, safe in a jar called the church, unaware that the seed is actually a seed—eternal, indestructible, exceedingly abundant, all-powerful HOPE. The Seed is Hope.

Romans 5:5 "Now hope does not disappoint, for the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."^{xlvi} Why does Love in us, mean that hope won't disappoint us? Well because, it's Love in you, that's doing all the hoping and God is love. And "Love bears all things, believes (faiths) all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love does not fail"^{xlvi} The Seed is not dependent on you; you are utterly dependent on the Seed.

7. Maybe we don't plant the seed, for we don't believe that God has made himself the Seed and invited us to share in his joy.

When I was a kid the greatest honor was when Dad would let me plant the seed, for I knew that the seed was Good. Maybe you can tell; I'm hoping that you would hope, and implant seeds of hope, wherever you go, where no one else can go. And you see that's every relationship you have. You can boldly go where I cannot go, and where no man has gone before, except Jesus. So,

when people expose a little dirt to you—when they confide in you, saying something like, “I feel desolate, barren, and broken; I feel like shit; I feel hopeless,” Plant the Seed!

Sometimes it might just be a hug testifying that you have Hope for them. Even better a Word, you can just say “Jesus,” or “God Saves, he is Salvation.” And if they say, “Well not for me,” you can start planting Scripture.

“All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God, and all are made right by his Grace as a gift...” (Romans 3:23) Have hope.

- “When you cry Abba, it’s the Spirit of Jesus in you crying Abba” (Romans 8)
- “God consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (Romans 11)
- “Every knee will bow, and every tongue give praise” (Romans 13)
- “Behold, I make all things New” says the voice from the throne in Revelation 21.

You don’t have to understand it, defend it, or explain it. JUST PLANT IT!^{xlvi} It may get messy, you may feel ridiculous because you can’t make it work, you may even suffer the loss of all things but PLANT THE SEED, because you don’t have faith in the dirt; you have put your hope in the Seed.

In our sermon from Romans 11, entitled “You Can Go to Hell,” I told you about the weird experiences that some of us had in the old church building on 30th and Vallejo which we were renting 12 years ago.



We recorded this bizarre dark shadow on video, then got rid of it through prayer, and then started having these weird encounters with ghosts.

The last time it happened, my wife (our cleaning lady) came to get me for she heard weeping on the other side of this crawl space door in the bottom of the church. To make a long story very short, in that dark room under the Old Sanctuary, my wife, saw these figures cowering in the darkness. We had learned that they weren’t demons, (demons react violently to the Word); they

were what the Bible calls phantasma, familiar spirits or ghosts--the souls of people who would not hear the Word.

And so, I prayed that Jesus would reveal himself and he did, along with a door that opened behind him to what Susan described as an entire new creation—she saw it.



The other side of the door looked like my grandpa's corn field in August. But on our side of the door, it was mid-winter.



Jesus appeared in glory, and Susan said, “Peter they won’t look up; they’re still cowering in the darkness covering their eyes.” And so, I just began to tell them about Jesus. I published *Yashuwah*. I just said stuff like, “He doesn’t hate you; he loves you; he came to save you; he doesn’t condemn you; he has forgiven you; he knows you and he likes you; And look, he makes all things new.”

As I was speaking, Susan started whispering in my ear, “Peter some of them are starting to look up, and the moment they see him, they rise and go to him, transformed by him and then they pass through that door.” So, what made them look up?

It wasn’t me. It was hope, embedded in those words, like Knowledge and Life embedded in a seed... and I didn’t make the life, the knowledge, or the Seed. My Father in Heaven isn’t dependent on me; he had just given me the wonderful honor of planting the seed, so I would share in his joy.



And then Susan said, “But Peter some of them won’t look up.” Their hearts were hard, but did you know—and trust me, I’m a geologist—did you know that at the surface of the earth, even the hardest of rocks, eventually turns to dirt and will surrender to the seed. The last thing Susan heard Jesus say that day in that room, under the stage, in the very spot, where I would stand and preach each week, was “I’m leaving this door here, for those that will still come.”

I’ve told you that story before, but this is my point right now: just a couple of years before that day, I would preach to about 1700 folks in a brand-new building and everyone liked me. But now I was preaching to one or two hundred; I had been branded a heretic and felt like an absolute fool because nothing seemed to be working.

But after that day, I’d stand in that spot, and remember that whether I see it or not, whether I wait a thousand years or just a day, no matter how dirty the dirt, shitty the shit, or broken the broken. The power is in the Seed, so put your hope in the Seed and sacrifice your kingdom of dirt—Our Father is inviting us to share in his Joy.

Communion

And so, the Root of Jesse, who is the Word by whom all things are created, took the bread, broke it, saying this is my body given to you. And, in the same way, he took the cup, saying this is the Covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in

remembrance of me. This is the Seed. You are the field. Put the Seed in the field and then boldly go where no man has gone before and plant it. In Jesus name, amen.

Benediction

Have you ever noticed how weird some of the songs are that we sing? “I’m hungry for you, thirsty for you.” You know, the early Christians were persecuted because the Romans said they were cannibals. Maybe all of humanity are cannibals or a wife, a bride. So what is he—food or seed? We eat him like soil eats a seed, but in reality the seed is eating the soil. The Seed is so good it transforms that shitty soil into life and even more seed. That’s how good God (the seed) is. I don’t know if the institution called “the Sanctuary” will ever get big or impressive in the world’s eyes. But what matters is that we plant the Seed, for “we will all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.” And on that day, the thing that will make us lift our heads and enter is Hope. And so, if it comes down to all this stuff or the seed, always choose the Seed. The Seed is eternal, the Seed cannot be stopped, and the Seed has already conquered. He’s just revealing that to us so that, having hoped in him, we would share his joy because that’s who we are. So, in Jesus’ name, plant the seed. And I’m so thankful for you—the Sanctuary—because you do plant the seed; we believe together. So believe the Gospel, plant Jesus, in his name, amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ We actually found bulletins from worship services around the turn of the last century. Amazingly, titles in the bulletins (Steward) matched titles used by Jesus in previous visions in which we had the ghosts go through the door with Jesus.

ⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 5:10

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 2:6

^{iv} Howard Storm died an early death having confessed that he was an atheist and therefore his own creator, savior and redeemer. In his book *Descent into Death*, he describes his descent into a very dark place where souls would literally bite and devour one another. He claims that he heard a voice rise up from within. It said “pray.” All he could think of was a hodge podge of apparently forgotten ideas. He just said them “I will fear no evil... mine eyes have seen the Glory... God Bless America...” The evil things left... and then he said “Jesus.”

Jesus appeared, delivered him from hades, gave him a glimpse of eternity, and then used the doctors to revive his body. It’s similar to the near-death experiences of others—but you shouldn’t simply rely on other’s experiences, you should rely upon the Word of God: Jesus.

And Scripture does say, “*In this hope we are saved.*”

So, assuming Howard Storm’s story is true, what was that voice that rose from within and told him to pray? It was seed, planted long ago... it was hope.

^v Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. —Philippians 2:9-11 (Romans 14:11, Isaiah 45:23)

^{vi} Romans 14:4

^{vii} So sure, the dogs are outside the city, the earth will be consumed by fire, no one is righteous... but God will still make all things new.

^{viii} Jesus is “the Word,” and he animates Scripture.

^{ix} And yet the seed has been there all along. It was in Isaiah and had been for 600 years. And it’s in everyone now, for everyone that’s anyone is the breath of God and dirt, and so everyone that’s anyone desires the Good, the Life, the Truth, and the Reason... they just don’t know who he is—and you can name him. You can’t make him grow, but you can plant the seed—he is Hope.

^x I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field... – 1 Corinthians 3:6-9a

^{xi} The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and to nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. – C. S. Lewis

^{xii} Psalm 23:1

^{xiii} Hope prolonged is making the heart sick, And a tree of life *is* the coming desire. ---Proverbs 13:12 YLT (Young's Literal Translation)
Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.—Proverbs 13:12 ESV

^{xiv} In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring (seed) be."^{xiv}

^{xv} Romans 4:13

^{xvi} Now he had come to a part of the wood where great globes of yellow fruit hung from the trees. . . It was like the discovery of a totally new *genus* of pleasures, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draught of this on earth wars would be fought and nations betrayed. It could not be classified. He could never tell us, when he came back to the world of men, whether it was sharp or sweet, savoury or voluptuous, creamy or piercing. "Not like that" was all he could every say to such inquiries. As he let the empty gourd fall from his hand and was about to pluck a second one, it came into his head that he was now neither hungry nor thirsty. And yet to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do. His reason, or what we commonly take to be reason in our own world, was all in favour of tasting this miracle again; the childlike innocence of fruit, the labours he had undergone, the uncertainty of the future, all seemed to commend the action. Yet something seemed opposed to this "reason." It is difficult to suppose that this opposition came from desire, for what desire would turn from so much deliciousness? But for whatever cause, it appeared to him better not to taste again. Perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity-like asking to hear the same symphony twice in a day.
– C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, pp. 42-43.

^{xvii} ¹⁵ O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach.

¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.

¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation.

¹⁸ Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?

¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them.

²⁰ And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the Lord.

²¹ I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."—Jeremiah 15:15-21

^{xviii} That morning I had offered all these people to God in prayer. I picture myself loading all of them onto a raft, offering it to Jesus, and pushing it out into the river... I thought that was it, but as I prayed I had a picture of that raft coming to me as a gift on the same river.

^{xix} Philemon 15-16

^{xx} Faith Hope and Love in you, is Jesus rising from the dead in you.... and when you learn to enjoy him, you will enjoy all things with him, and even as him.

One may, of course, be confused and one may doubt; but whoever once believes has something like a *character indelebilis*. He may take comfort of the fact that he is being upheld. Everyone who has to contend with unbelief should be advised that he ought not to take his own unbelief too seriously. Only faith is to be taken seriously; and if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, that suffices for the devil to have lost his game.
– Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press LTD., 1949), p. 20-21

^{xxi} In the first part of the book Paul makes a watertight case for the fact that we've all been consigned to disobedience, that is *none are righteous, no one understands, all have sinned and fallen short, all have died in Adam*. But then in the middle of chapter 3 he starts making the point that God has had, and is having, *Mercy on all*, for all are *justified by grace through faith*, and *will be made alive in Christ*, and so the word of the prophet is fulfilled *every knee will bow and every tongue give praise*. God will create humanity (Adam) in his own image, everything will be good, we will know it's good and praise God for The Good, which is the Life.

xxii God creates all things, including us, with this Word... and on the Seventh day, that is the Eternal Sabbath, everything is Good, and it is finished.

xxiii Revelation 22:16

xxiv 1 Corinthians 13:13

xxv I think it may be impossible to hope or desire anything but the Good, it's just that we don't know what it is, and we seek it in the wrong way, which is actually no way. To hope for "evil things" is to hope for nothing which you think is something; it is to desire a lie. "Everything created by God is good" wrote Paul.

xxvi Psalm 23:1

xxvii Romans 5:5 NRSV

xxviii "Neither he who plants, nor he who waters is anything, but only God who brings the growth... You are God's field." –1 Corinthians 3:7-8

xxix I think it was Fred Craddock who said this or something very close to this.

xxx Colossians 2:3

xxxi This is where we get our word "liturgy."

xxxii ²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered [*paradidomai*] to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed [*paradidomai*] took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. –1 Corinthians 3:23-26

Notice that it is primarily the apostle Paul who applied this concept to his apostolic office, and that he once did so, namely, in [1 Corinthians 11:23](#), in such a way that in the same verse he also applied it to Judas' treachery: "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed (delivered), took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it. . . ." The two "deliveries" are obviously mutually determinative, so that Paul is set in the shadow of Judas, as Judas is set in the light of Paul. There is no apostolic ["handing-over, betrayal" (*paradidomai*)] which does not have behind it the judgment of Judas' ["handing-over, betrayal" (*paradidomai*)] : the handing-over of which Judas and the Jews made themselves guilty by their handing-over, is taken up again, on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the delivery which calls the Church into life in all the world-the delivery of the apostles, of whom Paul is the least, and the one who worked more than they all.

--Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 11.2: The Doctrine of God*, p.483

xxxiii And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. –Isaiah 66:20

xxxiv Gentiles were forbidden from approaching the altar in the temple, but these gentiles are made holy by the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus—and offered to God as a sacrifice.

xxxv I call upon you, therefore, brethren, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice—living, sanctified, acceptable to God—your intelligent service; and be not conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, for your proving what *is* the will of God—the good, and acceptable, and perfect. – Romans 12:1-2 YLT

xxxvi Romans 1:5 (the beginning) AND 16:26 (the end); "faith unto faith." "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:16-17)."

xxxvii We naturally think, "Paul how could you say that? There's so much left to do!" But Paul knew that he had done what he had been asked to do, and that was plant the Seed.

xxxviii And might very well be pregnant.

xxxix *Hoti* is most commonly translated "that" rather than "because." This appears to be the meaning in Isaiah 6 and is clearly the meaning from John 12:42.

^{xi} This is Matthew 13:13. The ESV translated the next verse, which is the quotation of Isaiah 6:9 as “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” The word translated “never” is the Greek Word “ou” which is almost always translated “not” and never translated “never” in the KJV. The people that do not understand are “all of Israel” in Isaiah 6, which would include the Apostle Paul and everyone that Isaiah goes on to say will understand.

^{xli} This is precisely how Isaiah 11:10 is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of Isaiah that Paul’s readers would have read)

^{xlii} quoted by Luke in Acts, Paul in the Epistles, and Jesus in every Gospel!

^{xliii} In the same way we all take fruit from the tree of knowledge and grow a *tupos*, an old man, but the old man must die for in his place is revealed the new man who is our eternal life. A beautiful picture of all of this is found in Daniel chapter 4. Nebuchadnezzar is a picture of humanity (Adam) and Daniel speak the Word. Nebuchadnezzar is a tree in “the middle of the earth” (like the middle of the garden), but he has grown a kingdom of arrogance, and so the tree is cut down, but the stump is bound with an iron band and left in the field just as Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and is left in the field like an Ox. But after “seven periods of time,” “the end of days,” Nebuchadnezzar lifts his eyes to heaven and worships, His kingdom is restored—it’s a new (and eternal) kingdom that’s grown from the old stump. But the whole thing is the work of the Seed: the Word of God. It was the Word that created Nebuchadnezzar and the Word that recreated Nebuchadnezzar.

^{xliv} In John 17:12 Jesus reveals that he and the father have the same name; it must be Salvation.

^{xlv} *“To this end we toil and strive”* writes Paul (1 Timothy 4:19) *“because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”*

Whenever people are saved, it’s God who does the saving, and no one is fully saved until they believe....

^{xlvi} NKJV

^{xlvii} 1 Corinthians 13:7-8

^{xlviii} And when they protest, just ask them, “Do you think those Scriptures aren’t true? I suspect all Scriptures are true, and I know, *God is Salvation*”