

“NO DISAPPOINTMENT”

Romans 5:1-11

We stand by faith with a solid hope in Christ.

A sermon preached by
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In June of 1992, Jim Davidson and Mike Price climbed Mt. Rainier in Washington state, one of the tallest peaks in America, covered with glacial ice on the top year-round. On the way down from the summit, the two climbers fell 80 feet through a snow bridge into a glacial crevasse, a pitch-black, ice-walled crack in the massive glacier. Mike Price died from the fall.

In his book *The Ledge*, Jim Davidson tells how in that crisis moment, he thought back to his childhood and young adult years, particularly about his relationship with his father.

Jim's father early on had an almost reckless confidence in his son. Jim worked for his father painting high, steep-pitched roofs and electrical towers as early as age 12. The work terrified his mother, but Jim's father kept communicating his belief that Jim could accomplish great things if he pressed through adversity and kept going.

As Jim stood, bloodied and bruised, on the two-foot wide snow ledge next to the body of his climbing partner, he heard the voice of his father. The years of inspiration that Jim's father had invested in him flooded back into his mind and gave him encouragement.

With minimal gear and no experience in that kind of ice climbing, Jim spent the next five hours climbing out, battling fatigue and the crumbling ice and snow that threatened to bury him. Throughout his ordeal, Jim kept recalling the encouragement of his father. Five grueling hours later, thanks to his father's words, Jim climbed out of the crevasse to safety.¹

Today on Father's Day, if your dad was that kind of dad, you are thankful. If your dad was there to encourage you and inspire you and give you the life lessons to make you successful, that is a blessing, and we are grateful. Because we need all the help we can get, don't we? Sometime we find ourselves in a deep hole, our tail in a crack, as they used to say in south Arkansas.

Our loved ones die. Our health breaks. Our marriages fail. Our kids drive us crazy. Our parents drive us crazy. Our jobs drive us

crazy. We don't have enough time, enough money, enough energy, enough anything but trouble.

How do we stand it? How can we find peace when life keeps knocking us down? Where is the hope, the meaning that will carry us through? Where is the joy God promised? Our hearts cry out.

If your heart is crying out today, I have good news for you. Peace and hope and meaning and joy come from faith. Our relationship with God will carry us through the dark times. Paul writes to the Romans, "*Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"² Faith is the key. So let's explore three things faith means today.

Faith means we are **RESTORED TO RELATIONSHIP**. Paul says we are justified by faith. Justified means we are put right with God again, lined up correctly. We are not at war with God; we are at peace through our Lord Jesus. Christ has given us access to this grace in which we stand. Though we were once lost in sin and despair and disappointment and heartache and meaninglessness, we are now found in the grace of Jesus. Amazing grace!

The late Dr. Rodney Wilmoth was a pastor in Omaha, Nebraska. One night when he was taking out the garbage, he heard a child's voice calling out, "Help me. Somebody help me, please!" Rodney could tell it was a cry of real fear.

He put the trash cans aside and walked around the corner and found an eight- or nine-year-old boy pushing a bicycle up the hill in the dark. He asked if he could be of help. The boy said, "I'm lost, and I can't find my way home." Rodney asked if he knew his address, and the boy said, "Oh, yes. I live in Fremont." Fremont is about 35 miles west of Omaha.

Wilmoth was surprised. "You mean you rode your bicycle all the way from Fremont to Omaha?"

"Oh, no," he replied. "My family is here visiting my cousins. This is their bike. I borrowed it for a ride. I thought I could get home before dark, but now it's dark, and I don't know which way to go."

Rodney asked, “Do you know the name of your cousins?”

The boy brightened up and said, “Oh, yes, their name is Smith.” That was obviously no help.

“Do you know where they live?” He did not. “Do you think you would recognize the house if you saw it?” He thought he could.

So Rodney put the boy in the front seat of his car and the bicycle in the trunk. They drove only a few blocks when they saw a house with all of the lights on at the end of a street. The boy shrieked, “There they are! That’s my family!”

Rodney drove the boy up to the house. The youngster leapt out of the car and into the arms of his anxious family. Wilmoth unloaded the bicycle and began to get back in his car. Suddenly the boy called out, “Hey mister! Thanks! I was lost, and you found me!”

That’s the simple good news of our faith. When we are lost, Jesus finds us. He reaches out to us. He brings us home. Paul says, “*While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*”³ Jesus finds us by giving his life for us while we are still out there, still lost, still sinners, still turning away from God. Yet by the power of that love he restores our relationship and gives us peace in our disappointments.

The second thing that faith means is that we are **RESISTANT TO TROUBLE**. Faith doesn’t make our life trouble-free, but it does give us the power to overcome our difficulties. One of my favorite passages in the whole Bible is part of our text this morning: “*And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*”⁴

I'll have to admit, I had a little trouble with these verses at first. How can we "boast" in our sufferings? I thought boasting was a sin or at least bad manners. But on studying the background a little deeper, I discovered that the word translated "boast" in my Bible is translated "rejoice" in some other versions. The word actually means to exult, to rejoice, and to have extreme confidence. That makes more sense. Faith gives us extreme confidence in our God. So we can rejoice even in our sufferings, because we know that we and God can handle whatever comes. We will not be disappointed.

Captain Max Cleland was a confident, strong, young Marine on the day his life changed in 1968. In Vietnam, giving support to some soldiers surrounded by enemy forces, Max and two others jumped out of a helicopter and hit the ground. Max noticed a grenade lying on the ground and picked it up, thinking it had fallen out of his flak jacket. But the grenade was armed, and it exploded, taking off Max's right forearm and both of his legs below the knee. He was 25 years old.

They managed to save his life, but Max endured months of painful surgery and rehab following the injury. They amputated both legs above the knee and his right forearm. But Max still had a good mind, a hearty laugh, and a strong faith; the grenade did not destroy those qualities.

When he was discharged, Max went home to Georgia. At the age of 28, he was elected to the Georgia State Senate. Then he ran for lieutenant governor and was defeated. Max was extremely disappointed. Suddenly it seemed like the crushing weight of all his struggles covered him like a mountain of despair. Driving along a dark, rainy highway—yes, he could still drive!—he had another turning point. In his own words, "I could go no further by myself. On that rain-swept highway, I threw myself at the Lord's feet and cried out 'God, forgive me and help me!' When I reached out, he came to me. Since then, I really have become stronger at the broken places. And today I find more meaning, more purpose, and more joy in life than I ever thought possible."

Max's life was not over. He went on to serve President Jimmy Carter as the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, as the Georgia Secretary of State, as U. S. Senator from Georgia, and since 2009, as the Secretary of the American Battle Monuments Commission.⁵

Being a person of faith doesn't save you from tragedy, but it makes you resistant to trouble. Your suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And ultimately you will not be disappointed that you put your trust in God. You will not be disappointed that you had extreme confidence in your Creator.

In fact, that is the last meaning of faith I want to mention today. Faith means that we can **REJOICE IN HOPE**. Hope is really the theme of this passage. Paul uses the word three times in four verses. We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. (There's that word "boast" again—translate it "rejoice.") Hope is the end product of the process of endurance and character-building. We live in hope, and that God-given hope does not disappoint us. Hope is a gift of God's Spirit placed by his own loving hands deep in our hearts.

One of the great hymn-writers of hope was Fanny Crosby, but it was not because she never had to deal with any challenges. Born in 1820, she was blinded by illness at the age of six weeks, so effectively born blind. But by the age of 8, she was writing verse. She got an education and became a teacher of rhetoric, grammar and history in New York City. She is also known as the "Mother of Gospel Music." She wrote the words to over 8,000 hymns with the best hymn composers of her time. She also wrote secular verse, some of which she recited before Congress. Raised Baptist, toward the end of her life, Crosby became a Methodist (just had to get that in there!).⁶

In our hymnal, there are 7 Fanny Crosby hymns, and there are several others in the old Cokesbury hymnal. Hymns like "To God Be The Glory," "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," and "Rescue the Perishing"—great hymns. But perhaps my favorite Fanny Crosby hymn is a wonderful hymn of hope

called “Blessed Assurance”: “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood. ...Perfect submission, all is at rest; I in my Savior am happy and blest. Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love.”

Then that marvelous refrain: “This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long; this is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior, all the day long!”⁷

Despite her struggles and difficulties, Fanny Crosby could manage to rejoice in hope. She once said, “It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.”⁸

Restored to relationship, resistant to trouble, and rejoicing in hope—that’s the meaning of faith. That’s the grace in which we stand, Paul says. It’s like the story of the father and son who were walking through the toy department of a Wal-Mart one day. Set out in the aisle were some of those inflatable toys—we used to call them “Bobo dolls”—the kind that are weighted on the bottom, and you can use them for punching bags. You hit the doll, and it falls over, then it springs back up. You’ve played with these, right? The little boy hit one, and it fell over, then it came back upright. He was fascinated by that. So the dad stopped for a moment while the boy hit the doll several times, and it always came back upright. Finally, the dad said, “That’s pretty cool, isn’t it, son? How do you suppose he does that?”

And the little boy replied, “I don’t know, dad. He must be standing up on the inside.”

That’s the promise of our faith today. No matter how many blows life throws at us, no matter how many times we are knocked down, we can always get up again. We can overcome, because we are standing up on the inside. We are standing in the grace of God by the power of

Jesus Christ. When sufferings come, we can rejoice, because whenever we get knocked down and stand back up, it produces endurance. When we get knocked down and stand back up, it produces character. When we get knocked down and stand back up, we learn to live in hope. So whatever happens, we will not be disappointed. Whatever happens, we will stand and boast in the glory of God!

¹ Jim Davidson, *The Ledge: An Adventure Story of Friendship and Survival on Mount Rainier* (Random House Publishing, 2011).

² Romans 5:1.

³ Romans 5:6-8.

⁴ Romans 5:3-5.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Cleland.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanny_Crosby.

⁷ United Methodist Hymnal, No. 369.

⁸ "Fanny Crosby; America's Hymn Queen", *Glimpses of Christian History* 198, <http://www.christianhistorytimeline.com/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses2/>.