**ROADMAP TO PEACE**

We're hearing these days about the so-called "Roadmap to Peace" that the U.S. has laid on the table for the Israelis and Palestinians to digest and adopt. Most of the world is hoping that this process will result in a peaceful resolution to this centuries-old conflict. In this case our "hope" is perhaps defined as "wishful thinking" because the Roadmap is dependent upon no one making a first move toward peace. Rather both sides are to step forward simultaneously. Based on past and current performances, this remains wishful thinking.

Someone told me about ten days ago that the Bible's two primary themes are forgiveness and hope. As I rolled that around in my mind, I began to search for signs of forgiveness and hope in my own life.

**TODAY’S BIG QUESTION:**  **What comes to mind for you re forgiveness and hope? What's been your experience with these two entities? Or what do you wish you could experience in terms of forgiveness and hope?**

(DISCUSSION)

We've been poking around the edges of the greatest book in the world when it comes to the basics of the Christian faith: Paul's letter to the Roman believers. It certainly covers forgiveness and hope. What have we learned about them from Rabbi Paul?

In Romans 3:22-24 we see how vast God's forgiveness is. It has to be if it's to cover the sins of the world!

**Romans 3**

22 The "God-setting-things-right" that we read about has become "Jesus-setting-things-right" for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in Him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. 23 Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, 24 God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity He put us in right standing with Himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where He always wanted us to be. And He did it by means of Jesus Christ.

And the crowning statement on forgiveness is Romans 8:1.

**Romans 8**

1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

What are the results of knowing that we're forgiven by God? One of them is HOPE.

In Romans 5:2-5 we discovered that believers "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." And that for believers, even our sufferings result in "hope" because, by both experience and faith, we look to the final outcome of our faith -- that is, living in God's presence, in His glory, for all of eternity.

**Romans 5**

2 And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that He has already thrown open His door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand--out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

3 There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, 4 and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. 5 In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary--we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

And the crowning statement on hope is Romans 8:38-39.

**Romans 8**

38 I'm absolutely convinced that nothing--nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, 39 high or low, thinkable or unthinkable--absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

This week one writer reminded me that mere knowledge that God exists and that His Son Jesus live and died for our sins and came back from the dead won't save us. That's mental knowledge. Saving faith is embracing the Gospel, receiving God's love and forgiveness with our heart, soul and mind. This writer said, "It's tragic that many will miss heaven by just 18 inches -- the distance from their head to their heart.

Without receiving God's forgiveness, we have no hope. If you haven't done that yet, let me urge you to not let another night pass by before you do.

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