



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

**Words of Life**

**May 31, 2020**

**Romans 12:1-2**

**Clint Pressley**

*12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*(Pastor prays)*

The confluence of events that have happened in our world in recent days has stripped back and laid bare old wounds that need *real* healing. In two weeks, we have seen with our own eyes two young black men murdered and one by a police officer. And it's rattled us. Then we flip on the television and see images of anarchy and destruction, and it feels like I have wakened up in some racialized version of Dante's "Inferno" and this disorientation is enough to cause anger and fear and bitterness in the stoutest of hearts and I hate it!

Anger and fear and bitterness is a triple poison brewed by the Devil, and the only antidote is Jesus, the living water of life. And as Christians —black, brown and white— the Bible says that we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed but those who have faith and preserve our souls. Why? Because we have not been given a spirit of fear but of power and love and of self-control.

With that in mind, we come to this beautiful passage that God has providentially brought us to during this time. And with this text, over the next two weeks, we press the Gospel into every crevice of our hearts so that we don't sit silently or live aimlessly. We mourn with those who mourn but we don't mourn as those who have no hope. My intent as a brother in Christ, as a pastor, as a friend, and as another human being, is to press you to Christ, to press you to the cross of Jesus who is able to present you blameless before the presence of God's glory with great joy.

If the book of Romans is a mountain range, we've been climbing this mountain for some time now, a year and a half. Now we are on the peak in Romans 12. Chapter 11:36 ended with the wonderful verse, *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* And now in Chapter 12, based on everything he has said, Paul gives a clear call for wholehearted commitment to Christ, that's what we are about. It's a full-throated call to stake our all in the crucified, resurrected Jesus.

### **Our Only Hope is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

I want to press that hope into your heart today. Every word here in this short passage is packed with power. Today, and next Sunday, I want to take four words and use them for our guide stone in the days ahead. The first word is...

#### **Encouragement**

Let's read that first sentence again and deal with the word. **12** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

That word "appeal" is the word *parakletos*. It is a word for describing the Holy Spirit. The word means "to come alongside" and to urge and to exhort and to admonish. It means to be on someone's team with them and hoping to see the very best for that person. It's to coach and support and to stand with. It's not a command and not a shout and not an argument.

And what Paul is encouraging his brothers and sisters in the Lord to do is to run to Christ, to submit to Jesus, to see Jesus dying on the cross for their sins, being raised for their life and that Jesus is worth their *everything*. He is worth you giving up hopes and dreams, reputation and pride. It is worth it to give yourself to God without reserve, to present yourself to God as a living sacrifice is to yield yourself to Him without reserve, and in the days ahead, whatever conversations, talks or Facebook posts you make, they need to be ones of encouragement that are not just "nice words" but a pressing on to the Gospel of Jesus. Because our only hope is the Gospel of Jesus. Encouragement.

The second word is...

#### **Affection**

Let's read the first sentence again. You're going to know this before we get done. **12** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,*

*holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* You see that word “brothers.”

There is a note of warmth and love and Christ-centered unity in what Paul is saying here. We are 12 chapters into this letter that we've been studying for a year and a half. And throughout the entire letter, Paul has been fully conscious of the tensions between Jews and Gentiles worshipping in one church.

And by using the word “brothers” as a blanket over both groups, he is reminding them of the deep affection that being in Christ brings. With that affection comes responsibility to be long suffering, to assume the best and not the worst, to talk *to* and not *at*, to build trust and not suspicion, and— in our cultural moment —to fight racism. When black and brown brothers and sisters hurt, white brothers and sisters hurt, too. You might not know what to say or how to articulate it, but don't be quiet, because we share something that goes deeper than race or culture. It's the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for the black, brown and white family we call Hickory Grove. And the unity we have in Christ is greater than any division that threatens us. It's why we run to the Gospel. Because our only hope is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Encouragement. Affection.

## **Theology**

Let's read the sentence again. *12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

Can you see that word “therefore”? It's Paul saying, “I am making my appeal to you based on everything I've said up to this point.” Remember that Romans is Paul's theological *magnum opus*. And most of that theology is teaching us how salvation works. It's why we must always remember that doctrine and devotions go together. And it's why we as Christians cling so tightly to the substitutionary atonement of Jesus dying on the cross. It's why, with any issue we face, we stand in that issue and draw a straight line to the cross of Jesus.

We've seen the depravity of Man. We are living it! And that depravity has one solution. It's the perfect life, substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus. There is our hope and our unity and our bond. Furthermore, at the cross we receive something called “imputed righteousness.” Not only does Jesus take our sins, He gives us His righteousness. The grace of God found at the cross of Jesus is the greatest act of equality for mankind so that theologically we know we were made in the image of God but that image has been disfigured by sin and causes us to be separated from God. Our only hope is Jesus. Grace comes in faith and repentance that whoever

calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Because our only hope is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Encouragement. Affection. Theology and Mercy.

## **Mercy**

Let's go back to the sentence. *12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* The mercies of God are piled up mercies, extra mercies, mercies left over. His mercies are new every morning. Our sins, they are so many; His mercy is more. This is where we live. This is how we defeat hate. It's God's mercy given to us in Jesus. God has besieged us with His mercy. He has carpet-bombed us with mercies. He has poured out a ceaseless cannonade of kindness and mercy into our hearts. He has overwhelmed us with unmerited favor and love. He has carried us long on the resistless arms of mercy. He has removed our sin. He has healed our hearts and He has saved our lives.

And the reason we can have hope, and love people who don't love us, and live with strength in our hearts is God's unending mercy. What's going to gladden your heart and drive your commitment to Jesus Christ? More than anything is an increasing understanding of the greatness of God and His mercies to us in Jesus. It's not gimmicks or games or sex appeal. We build a foundation through clear teaching and ever-deepening love for God's mercies promised and given to us in Jesus. It's when you see these mercies of God. It's when you put your hands in the scars and you draw near to His wounded side. When you crucify the anger and abuse, racism and ambition and start building your life on the mercies of God. That's when you see how the Gospel of Jesus is our only hope. It's why we keep pressing toward the cross; it's why we preach Jesus Christ, the just and the justifier, the reconciler to God and to others. We trust the power of the Gospel to change your heart, sustain your life and to heal.

God make it so, heal us by your grace, heal us by your wounds. Come to the cross and be healed by God's mercy.

*(Pastor prays)*