

Sermon Draft

Text: Romans 15:4–13

Sermon: True Hope

“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” (Rom 15:13). In the name of Jesus. Amen.

What do you HOPE for?

There’s one kind of hope that’s really a wish. As Christmas approaches, many are hoping to receive certain presents. They may or may not get them. Hope, the way we normally think of it, is usually just optimism. Charlie Brown always hopes this will be the year Lucy doesn’t pull the football away, and he’ll give it a mighty kick.

But what does it mean to hope as a Christian? True hope, Christian hope is grounded in God’s deeds and promises. Paul says to us in our text today from Romans 15, *“Christ became a servant . . . to confirm the promises [God gave]”* (v 8). That’s the basis for real hope, our Christian hope, the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

Christians can, though, succumb to a false kind of hope, a kind of faith that is mere optimism, a belief that “everything is going to be okay.” This is a false faith that gets quickly dashed when the rough trials of life come. As we wait in hope for our Lord’s return, we can become weary and discouraged. Life is filled with all sorts of unexpected troubles, things that we never imagined when we were starting out. Once, we were filled with hope, but the way things have turned out, is this what we hoped for? No couple getting married hopes for divorce. As we go about our daily business, we never imagine that around the next bend is a car that will smash into us, altering not just the afternoon but perhaps the rest of our days. Is this what we hoped for? How can one be a Christian in the midst of such things? Is being a Christian just being optimistic, hoping for good things to come later on, maintaining a cheerful disposition?

Be wary of such a notion of hope! And hope not in yourself, that somehow your good deeds, your interior sincerity will someday pay off. Hope in yourself is destined to fail.

Christian hope is not a wish. To hope as a Christian is not simply to want everything to turn out well. Christian hope is complete confidence and sure conviction. How can we have such a hope? We cannot find it in our self, because it doesn't come from us. We must look outside our self, to God and his mighty acts and promises. That is why, when Paul begins to talk about hope in today's Epistle, he points us to the Holy Scriptures: ***“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”*** (v 4).

The Holy Spirit did not inspire the Scriptures to be written as a mere list of dos-and-don'ts, a sort of holy etiquette book to teach us to mind our sacred *p*'s and *q*'s. The Lord's Law is there to show us our sin, to be sure, but the record of God's deeds and promises done for and given to his holy people is there for us to learn that God is the One in whom we should trust, a God who desires to bring us out of our troubles into grace and blessing.

“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.”

Consider the many saints who in the midst of suffering had endurance, which we can also think of as patience. Think of Job, so patient in his suffering, even though he lost his children, possessions, and health, plus he had a faithless wife. Recall how everything and more was restored to him, in God’s own time.

Think of Joseph, betrayed by his brothers, so patient in prison, accused unjustly by his master’s wife. Recall how he was raised up as a prince over a foreign people, in God’s own time, for the ultimate purpose of saving not only Joseph’s family, but the line out of which the Messiah would come. Think of David, patient in suffering as his father-in-law Saul, the king, and later his own son Absalom, the prince, both plotted to kill him. Recall how the Lord delivered David, in his own time, again for the ultimate purpose of providing a Savior for all the nations of the earth.

All of these men were patient in adversity; they showed endurance even when it seemed God was against them. Not because they had cultivated some sort of stoic virtue. Job, Joseph, and David were much more than courageous or steadfast. They trusted in the promise that God would rescue them in due time, in his own way.

Every trouble we have in life, be it with money, family, health, or whatever—it all comes from a more fundamental malady: our total sinfulness and depravity that mars every human relationship, that sickens and finally destroys every human body, that warps and twists every human mind away from our God and Father.

The Lord long ago gave his promise, the promise that a man would be born to overthrow the diabolical serpent who spins lies against God's Word, a man who would crush the serpent's head and destroy death. The Lord gave his promise, and he fulfilled his promise in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his Son.

“Christ became a servant . . . to confirm the promises [God gave].” Risen from the dead, he gives us reason to hope, hope for our own resurrection, freed from suffering and sin for life with God.

Why not now? We are so impatient, not able to wait for anything. That’s why we need Advent. Advent cultivates in us the discipline of waiting not only waiting for Christmas, but waiting for the Lord to fulfill his promise. In all our troubles, the Lord is cultivating in us the discipline of patient endurance. The Lord comes on his time, not the world’s time. But there is another reason for waiting; there is another reason why the Lord has not yet returned to judge the quick and the dead. The Lord does not relish the thought of judging and condemning to hell those who are unrepentant. Thus the Lord waits, earnestly desiring all to turn from sin and call upon him for help. As it is written in 2 Peter 3:9, *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*

To those whom the Lord has brought to true repentance, God gives reason to hope not wishful thinking, but real substantive hope: as he fulfilled his promise in the past by mighty deeds, so he will fulfill his promise to us, to forgive us all our sins, raise us up from dust and decay, and bring us to everlasting joy. In fact, the Holy Scriptures specifically say, in Acts 2:38–39, ***“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children.”***

No one is fit to receive God’s gifts, his promises. Nothing we do can make us deserve it. That’s what God says to each of us. All the words and promises of the Scriptures apply to you. The Lord who was David’s Shepherd is now your Shepherd. The Lord who gave Job grace to persevere in his affliction promises you the same grace to persevere in all your troubles. And the Lord who brought Joseph out of the pit and then out of the dungeon will bring us out of the pit of our grave and out of the dungeon of death into life with him.

In the midst of the most hopeless life, the Lord's promises give reason to hope. In the midst of the most painful death, the Lord promises to raise you out of death into life. Only in Christ is there any hope and that hope is not just wishful thinking.

Now, what should that produce among us who have been given such hope? Paul says, ***“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Romans 15:5–6).

The hope that we have produces two things here: Christians worship together “With one voice glorifying God.” And Christians live in peace with one another being patient with one another as God is patient with us, and being harmonious toward one another that is, not allowing arguments and fights to turn us away from one another and the Lord.

Be patient. Be patient in waiting for Christmas. There's no need to rush. Be patient in waiting for God to come. He who has promised is faithful, and he will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Be patient with one another. Hope in God; be kind to one another.

Now "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" (Rom 15:13). In the name of Jesus.

Amen