



HOPE

ADVENT | Week 1

Hope is a word we hear often during Christmas or the Advent season. It is important to make sure that our understanding of this powerful word is correct because the New Testament idea of hope is very different from the way the world thinks about hope.

We might hear someone say, “Will the Cowboys win the championship this year?” And someone will respond, “I don’t know, I hope so!” Someone might stop and ask, “Do you think it will snow on Christmas Day?” And often the reply will be, “I’m not sure, but I hope so.” Hope is commonly thought of as a desire for some future event or circumstance that we cannot be certain will come to pass. But that is not the way the New Testament speaks about hope.

Titus 1:2 “...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.”

Hebrews 3:6 “...but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”

Hebrews 6:11 “...And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end...”

We have a fully assured hope because it based on a God who never lies. We have a fully assured hope because it is based on the faithfulness of God’s Son, not ours. We have a fully assured hope because of the countless saints that have gone before us.

Abiding Hope in Christ

“For 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. 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. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name.”

And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him.”

And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles 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.”

Romans 15:4-13 (ESV)

You have probably heard that hope is **Having Only Positive Expectations**. And for glass-half-full kind of people, this acrostic probably works splendidly. But for those of us that tend toward anxiety and despair and depression, it seems kitschy and unworkable. Hope is harder for some of us to access. But in this passage in Romans 15, Paul, the master lawyer and logician, is building an argument for hope and giving us a roadmap for how to get there.

By the time Paul gets to this penultimate chapter in his letter to the churches in Rome, he has argued for the primary doctrines of his theology: condemnation, justification, sanctification, and the sovereignty of God. Beginning in chapter 12, though, Paul turns to applying these doctrines to the everyday life of the believer with a series of imperatives. He tells them, in view of all of these things I have said about God and His character, here are some things that you should do.

In Chapter 12, he admonishes the Roman Christians to “present [their] bodies as... living sacrifice[s].” In Chapter 13, he tells them to be “subject to the governing authorities” and that “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” In Chapter 14, he tells them to avoid quarrels over insignificant details and not to “put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”

This is the backdrop for Chapter 15, which starts with a completion of Paul’s thought from Chapter 14 about the appropriateness of certain foods for the believer. Paul encourages the Roman Christians to lay aside their own rights in favor of their neighbors and for the sake of unity. Intermingled with his discussion about unity, Paul is simultaneously discussing hope for the individual.

Like any good debater, Paul starts his discussion of hope in verse 4 with his premise. He tells us that that everything that was written in former days was written for our instruction. Given Paul’s background as a Pharisee of Pharisees, we know that he has the Old Testament in view here when he discusses “whatever was written in former days.” But he makes it clear that at this point in his life, the scriptures are not just an intellectual pursuit. The goal of this instruction is that

“through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” For Paul, Scripture was not written primarily to make us smarter, it was written to make us more hopeful.

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Paul’s argument for hope starts in earnest in verse 8 where he tells us the two-fold purpose of Christ’s coming: to fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs; and in order that Gentiles—us—would glorify God for His mercy. Paul then supports his argument with three verses from the Old Testament: Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43, and Psalm 117:1.

In Psalm 18:49, David is celebrating a military victory by praising God in the presence of the Gentiles. David's praise is reminiscent of the promise to Abram in Genesis 12:3 that in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Paul then quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 117:1 as admonitions to the Gentile to praise the Lord. Why should Paul admonish the Gentiles to praise? Because, like in the battle referenced in Psalm 18:49 where David was victorious, God has been merciful.

Paul ends his argument by quoting the prophet Isaiah, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." For Paul, the line between, Jesus, the "root of Jesse," and hope could not be any straighter. And this is what we celebrate at Advent: the coming of the root of Jesse, the coming of the personification of mercy, and the coming of hope. Jesus was of the "house and lineage of David," and it is in Him that we have been shown mercy. It is in Him that we have hope.

Thus, in Paul's argument, David sets the example for praise as he praises the Lord for His mercy in giving him a military victory "among the nations." He praises the Lord for His salvation and because He "shown steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever." He then twice admonishes Gentiles to praise in unity with Israel. But he wraps up his argument by telling us that we praise because the root of Jesse has come.

At bottom, what we find out is that hope—as it is revealed in Scripture—is not mere kitsch. It is not an emotion or a destination to escape to or even an expectation. Real abiding hope is found only in a Person. And that Person is revealed in a Book.

Paul tells us that the source of hope is Holy Scripture. Not because words on a page or old stories "written in former days" are inherently hopeful, but because those words and stories point us to a Person—a Person that put on human flesh and walked where we walk and felt what we feel. He came near to us and He became like us so He could relate to us. And show us mercy. And trusting in His present and future mercifulness, we can be hopeful.

Prayer

Take time to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the hope that He gives through Scripture and His son, Jesus.

Our Father, thank you for the gift of your Word and how it redirects us to the source of our hope, Jesus.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. Considering today's passage, how would you define hope?
2. Would you normally describe this time of year as hopeful? Why or why not?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. Are you a glass half full or a glass half empty kind of person? Why do you think you are the way you are? Does the way you respond to life in that way glorify God?
2. How can your faith in Jesus and His promises of great things help you live with hope in your heart?

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

