

What Are You Hoping For?

2nd Sun. in Advent – 12/04/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 15:4-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 13, “**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.**”

Introduction

⌘ What do you hope for?

→ There is one kind of hope; the kind that our world typically thinks of when it thinks of hope, that is really more of a wish. As Christmas approaches, so many are hoping to receive specific presents. In reality, they may or may not get what they hope for, so that means it's really a wish.

→ So, is hope nothing more than trying to be optimistic in life? In the old comic strip, Charlie Brown always hopes that this will be the year Lucy doesn't pull the football away, and he'll give it a mighty kick. Yet his hopes are dashed over and over again.

⌘ But what does it mean to hope as a Christian? What is true hope; God's definition and understanding of “hope” in His Holy Word?

→ Christian hope is grounded in God's deeds and promises. St. Paul says to us in our text today from Romans 15:8, “Christ became a servant ... to confirm the promises (that God gave) to the patriarchs”. That's the basis for real hope, our Christian hope, the hope that we are gifted to have in Christ Jesus.

I. The World gives us false hopes.

⌘ But Christians can still fall prey to a false kind of hope; even a kind of faith that is nothing more than optimism; a belief that “everything is going to be okay”.

→ This kind of “false faith” is the kind that gets its hopes quickly dashed when the mishaps and tragedies of life come along. As you and I wait in hope for our Lord's return, many Christians become weary and discouraged. And it makes sense if you look at it from a personal or worldly perspective, because, we all know that life is filled with all sorts of unexpected troubles; things that we never imagined or expected when we were starting out.

⌘ Look back at your own personal history. Most of us at some point were filled with hope, right? But the way things have turned out ... Well, is this what you hoped for?

→ No couple getting married, for example, hopes for divorce. Parents of a new baby don't hope for discipline problems. 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?

→ So, how are we supposed to be a Christian in the midst of such a life? Well, is being a Christian just being optimistic, hoping with a bit of uncertainty that good things will come along; working hard to maintain a cheerful disposition?

⌘ My dear Christians, don't let such a notion of hope take hold in your thinking! And hope not in yourselves either; that somehow your good deeds, your deep-down sincerity will someday pay off and get you into God's Kingdom.

→ Those kinds of hope; hope in yourself is always destined to fail, because that only makes you into your own false god, which is the very worst sort of idolatry.

⌘ And then there is the ever-popular hope that has no object; no thing or no person to actually hope in. It's just a nondescript hope in nothing more than the undefined concept of “hope”. That

sort of hope will always fail as well. So whatever the false hope may be, if we latch onto it even for a moment, we will still end up hopeless. We might be sincere in our false hope, but that will only make us “sincerely wrong”.

II. “...written...[that] we might have hope” (v.5)

- ⊗ Fortunately Christian hope is not just a wish. To hope as a believer in Christ is not simply to want everything to turn out well. Christian hope is complete confidence and a sure conviction that will not, and cannot fail!
 - ➔ How can you and I have such a hope? You can't find it in yourself, because true hope doesn't come from you. It comes from outside of yourself; from God and His mighty acts and promises. That's why, when Paul begins to talk about hope here in verse four of our text, he points us to the Holy Scriptures. He says, “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”.
- ⊗ You see, the Holy Spirit did not inspire God's Word to be written as a mere list of dos-and-don'ts; a sort of holy etiquette book to teach you and me to mind our sacred *p*'s and *q*'s. The Lord's Law is there in the Bible to show us our sin, yes, but also to record God's deeds and God's promises done for and given to His holy people throughout history. It's there so that you and I will learn that God is the One; the only One in whom we should trust; a God who desires to bring us out of our troubles into grace and blessing.
 - ➔ Paul says that Holy Scripture “...was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (v.4). What are the things that Paul's talking about in Scripture? Well, consider the many saints – I think especially of Job here – who in the midst of suffering had endurance, did not lose hope. We can also think of it as patience. Job was so patient in his suffering, even though he lost his children, possessions, and health – plus he had a faithless wife. Who among us would have had that kind of endurance of faith? Yet in the end everything and more was restored to him, in God's own time.
 - ➔ Think also of Joseph, how he was betrayed by his brothers – so patient in prison; accused unjustly by his master's wife. Remember how he was raised up as a prince over all of Egypt in God's own time; for the ultimate purpose of saving not only Joseph's family, but the line from which the Messiah would come.
 - ➔ And think of David, patient in suffering as his father-in-law Saul, the king; and later his own son Absalom, the prince, each plotted to kill him. Yet we are told of 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 through his bloodline.
 - ➔ All of these men were patient in adversity; showing endurance even when it seemed God was against them. Why? Because they had some sort of extra-strong virtue? No. Job, Joseph, and David were so much more than courageous or steadfast. They trusted without doubt in the promise that God would rescue them in due time, and in His own way.
- ⊗ So every trouble you have in life, be it with money, family, health, or whatever – it all comes from a more fundamental disorder: our complete sinfulness and depravity that corrupts every human relationship; that sickens and finally destroys every human body; that warps and pries every human mind away from our God and Father.
 - ➔ So, long ago the Lord gave His promise; the promise that a man would be born to overthrow the diabolical serpent who spins every lie against God's Word. This “Man” would crush the serpent's head and in the same series of events destroy death! Yahweh gave that promise, and He fulfilled His promise in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of His Son.

→ Verse eight says that “Christ became a servant ... to confirm the promises [God gave]”; to prove them valid and true! Then risen from the dead, He gives you and me reason to have true hope; hope for our own resurrection at Jesus’ return. And even in this life He frees us from the bonds of suffering and sin, to live this earthly life in the joy and peace of living with and for God.

III. In Hope the Lord Cultivates Patient Endurance

✘ “Well, that’s just great Pastor”, you might be thinking. “But I don’t have that ‘joy and peace’ right now.” And I get that. At times, we all find ourselves deep in the middle of an extreme challenge, or a time of chronic emotional or medical difficulty, and we struggle with the temptation to ask, “Why me? Why now?”

→ But the endurance that Paul is talking about in verses 4 & 5 is God’s gift for precisely those kinds of times. It’s exactly what the season of Advent is all about because it turns us away from a sinful obsession with the things and difficulties of this world into a confident hope in the only One who overcomes any and all difficulties and struggles.

→ You see, Advent understood and done properly, teaches and cultivates within hopeful Christians the discipline of patient endurance. It shows us that the Lord comes in His time, not the world’s time. What might seem to us like God has forgotten us in our time of need, as 2 Peter 3:9 shows us, is really the Lord’s loving desire that more souls might be saved for eternity. Peter says, “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 real substantive hope. You can count on this fact, friends: just as He fulfilled His promise in the past by His mighty deeds, so God will fulfill His promise to you; to forgive you all your sins; to raise you up from dust and decay; and to bring you to everlasting joy before His eternal heavenly throne.

→ Any parent who has come to repentance and heard God’s promises wants the same gift for his/her child! In fact, the Bible specifically says 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 (which is that gift of forgiveness). For the promise is for you and for your children”, Peter says.

✘ Nothing we do makes any of us deserve it. That’s why infant Baptism is such a clear picture of how the Lord works. God takes someone who can’t walk, can’t talk, can’t feed or clothe himself, and says, “I give you My promise; you are mine”. God still says that to you today. All of the Bible’s words and promises still apply to you today. The Lord who was David’s Shepherd is your Shepherd. The Lord who gave Job grace to persevere in his affliction promises you the same grace to persevere in your troubles. And the Lord who brought Joseph out of the pit and the dungeon promises to bring you out of the pit of your grave; out of the dungeon of death into life with Him.

IV. The Church Lives Together in Christian Hope

✘ So yes, in the midst of even the most hopeless life; in the midst of the most painful death, the Lord’s promises of healing and relief and resurrection give us all a sure reason to hope; a hope that is no wishful thinking. It is God’s certain hope!

→ So, what kind of difference does that mean among us here in God’s Church today? In verses 5-6 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”. So our Christian hope produces two

things: #1) Christians worship together; we “glorify the...Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.6). And #2) Christians live in peace with one another. We Christians follow the Spirit’s lead so that we seek to show patience with one another just as God is patient with us. With His Word and help, we don’t allow arguments and fights to turn us against one another or even the Lord.

⊗ So my dear believers, embrace the Advent lessons. Be patient in waiting for Christmas. There’s no need to rush. Just as He gives us patience to grow as we prepare for Christmas, so He gives us patience as we wait for Jesus to come again to bring us to our eternal home. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it”.

➔ Be patient with one another. Be patient as you endure difficulty. And hope in God, for He is with you. He is strong. He does love you. And all of His promises will one day come about.

⊗ 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” (v. 13). Amen.