

Romans 15:4-13 "Transcendent Hope"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that you would continue to pour out the Holy Spirit with gentle power upon us and deep within us. Father, sometimes it's hard for us to believe that you desire us to live a life of hope, and you know how confused we are about that. So we ask, Father, as you make Jesus more real to us this morning, and as your Word is open for us, that you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, would help us to abound in hope. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So we all probably know different people who seem to know a lot. In fact, we all probably know people who seem to know they think they know everything, they act like they know everything, and in fact, maybe in the odd times you've tried to butt heads with them, it looks like they know everything. And I'm thinking immediately, I know that there's a range of people who are like this. I'm thinking of two people immediately, though, in my mind.

One of them, and I'm going to mention the name of the good person. He's now with Jesus, so I don't have to worry about him being embarrassed. Some of you might have heard of J.I. Packer. He was listed as one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, and he was a really, really good guy.

He, you know, we use the English Standard Version of the Bible here in terms of preaching, and he was the general editor of that, so he sort of knew the Bible pretty well. He's a general editor of an English translation of the Bible. And let me tell you, he was such a good, he was such a nice man.

[2 : 59] He's the polar opposite of this other fellow that I'm thinking of, who claimed and thought he knew everything. And he used his knowledge to constantly put everybody around him down and to belittle them.

We all probably know people like that. They seem to know a lot, and all they do is use their knowledge to put other people down, put them in their place, shut them up, make them feel really tiny.

J.I. Packer was the complete opposite of that. I had the great privilege of, we were both part of a national movement, and I got the great pleasure, actually the great nervousness of preaching the Bible to him for five years when we would meet every two months. And I would tell people it's very intimidating to preach the Bible to J.I. Packer. He's forgotten more than I've ever learned.

But he was just very kind and gracious and encouraging all the way through. And so I mention all of this because we're going to look at a Bible text today that basically says that the Bible is from God, and obviously if there is a God that does exist, he knows everything. So the question is, who is God more like the unnamed person who puts people down, or is he more like J.I. Packer but only way, way better?

Well, let's look. And so if you would turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 15, we're going to be looking at verses 4 to 13. And just by the way, you know, you could, if you remember a little bit about what Monique read, you know, this, it's really, really interesting. Last week, you can go back and listen to the sermon. I talked about how we're practicing Advent like they would have in 1549, or 424. And they saw Advent as the beginning of the Christian year, not as preparation for Christmas.

[4 : 49] And so they, all their Bible texts and their prayers are helping people to give their life, like to recommit their lives to Christ, and sort of rededicate your life to pursue holiness. And so the text that we looked at last week gave some very important ideas about how that works. And today, it's on the Bible, because if you want to become more godly, you need to read the Bible.

And it's really interesting that out of all the Bible texts that the early Christians could have picked, and that Christians from the late 300s up until today would pick as, in a sense, Bible Sunday, it's really interesting they picked a text that emphasizes hope and encouragement. I think that's actually really cool. It's sort of maybe not how we would think about what the older Christians would have been like. Anyway, let's look. The flow of the book of Romans is, there's a bit of an introduction, then there's the prairie, what the whole book is about, and then from chapter 1, verse 18, to the end of chapter 11, it is, what is the gospel? And then from chapter 12 to the end is, how do you live your life if the gospel is true? And so we're in that part, and here's how the text goes.

Verse 4, for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction. Now, he's not just talking about everything that's written, he's talking about the Bible. It'll become clear in a moment, but start that again. 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. Very, very beautiful, very, very simple text. I mean, one of the things we're going to have to struggle with as we read the text is, I think if you were to ask the average Canadian what the Bible is like, is the Bible a source of encouragement and hope? Are Christians people of hope and encouragement? Probably most

Canadians would say that we weren't, that the Bible isn't, and that we're not. Now, that might be a little bit of prejudice, and maybe it is a little bit that sometimes we, you know, one of the things I talk about at Ryle Seminary, about the type of student, I mean, we'll take any student, but what we hope our graduates are like, we want them to be the opposite of keyboard jihadis. Some of you who are familiar with the fights that go on online, those are those Christians who seem to inhabit the basement, firing away on their computer, telling everybody how wrong they are, and only they're right, right? And so there are a lot of Christians like that. I call them keyboard jihadis, which isn't a compliment, and that is how a lot of Christians are, but this is actually a very, very powerful text, and there's something very subtle that happens here. I'm going to read it again, verse 4 and 5. It's very subtle, but it's very important. Look at verse 4 again. It says this, 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. Now, verse 5, so it talks as if these things were written, and it just looks as if they were written by, of course, just human beings, and then in verse 5, though, it says, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, and in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the shift there is very subtle, but it says these human people, these humans have written these texts from earlier days, but then it makes the claim that it's actually God that caused those things to be written.

And so that's, if you could put up the first point, that would be 1A, that would be, they're very helpful. What the Bible here is telling us is that the triune God is the ultimate author of the Bible, or the triune God is the ultimate speaker of the Bible, and that will include both the Old and the New Testament. It includes both the individual words, the phrases, the paragraphs, the chapters, the books, all the way up to the whole. So at every level, God is ultimately the one who is speaking through the text, and that what this is implying is that God does a threefold miracle to cause his word to be written. And this threefold miracle is this, is that first of all, well, let's use like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It wasn't necessarily that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John thought that they were writing something that would end up being in the Bible.

[9 : 49] And it isn't as if God just sort of took them over, and he acted, they were just like his puppets, and they wrote down the things, and they're just sort of observing it. It's not them doing it as like a type of automatic writing. It's not like that at all. What it is, is that God works through human beings, their uniqueness, their personalities, their character, to call, but at the end of the process, what he wanted to be written was written. And he definitely uses their personality. Now, obviously, they're, I'm using the example of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, at different times they're quoting Jesus. But the rest of it, well, here's what it would be. Imagine that we could go back in time, and God, in his sense of humor, decides that they're not going to be called the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It's going to be, I don't know, the book of Andrew, the book of Owen, the book of Josiah, and the book of George. And if you know Andrew, or Owen, or Josiah, or George at all, if we were to have written those Gospels, and then we were just to hand them out to you and say, guess which one of these four men wrote each book? Well, I haven't read too much that Andrew has written, but my bet is that people would very quickly say, oh yeah, yeah, that's clearly Andrew. That's how he speaks. Oh yeah, yeah, that's Owen. I gave Owen the shortest book. He has to write briefs. And so he's going to be brief and very, you know, compact. And Josiah, you can really get Josiah's flavor. And then I gave myself the longest book. Oh yeah, yeah, that's clearly George. So that's what God does with his Bible. That's the first miracle, that

Luke is just trying to write the best history he can. Matthew and Mark and John, the same type of thing. But in the midst of all of that, God made the words that he wanted to have completed there. And the second miracle is that other Christians recognized that out of all of the things that John had spoken over the years, and maybe all of the different letters that he'd written, this was different. This was something that comes right from God. That's the second miracle. And the third miracle is that it's preserved. One of the slurs that's made against us by Islamic apologists, and a misunderstanding that many Canadians have, is that somehow or another, after Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome, he somehow dictated that the Bible was going to be a certain type of way. And that's just completely and utterly wrong. What's really a fascinating miracle is that whether you're like me and you think that everything in the New Testament was written before the year 70, or whether you think it was all written before the year 92 or 93, Christianity was a minority religion frowned upon by the people, subject to frequent small and local persecution, and occasionally subject to massive empire-wide or large chunks of the empire-wide persecution. And yet, when the 300s come, and now there's a change in power and Christians have some degree of safety and respect, the Bible's preserved. It's preserved. Those are the three miracles, that God causes the scriptures to be written, what he wants is written, that they're recognized, and that they're preserved. And so we say that when we hear the Bible speaking, we hear God speaking to us, because the triune God is the ultimate speaker of the Bible. Now, generally speaking, I don't get involved in controversies with other churches, but I'm going to have to make a little bit of a controversial statement today. It's just controversial because it's contested. I think this is the historic Christian teaching, and if you could put up the second slide, that would be very helpful. Now, if you see there, there should be a line, and if

I could have redone it, I would have made that line very, very strong and thicker. And what you see is that on one side of the line is God's Word written, the Bible. And underneath that line is tradition, reason, reason, creeds, councils, popes, and theologians. And that's what this text of the Bible is teaching. That's what Jesus teaches. That's what the Bible teaches in time after time after time after time. And what it's saying is that, in a sense, there's a qualitative and ontological difference between the Bible and everything else. And that's why it has, on one side of that very thick line is God's Word written. Underneath it are all of those other things, which, by the way, it doesn't mean those other things aren't important, but it just means that those things underneath the line are valid to the extent that they help you to understand God's Word written. Tradition can't correct the Bible, but the Bible can correct tradition. Theologians can't correct the Bible, but the Bible can correct theologians. Theologians can help us to understand the Bible better.

Councils can help us to understand the Bible better, but the Bible is unique. What's underneath the line is very important. A very brief story. I was in third year, I became a Christian in grade 12.

[15 : 13] In third year university, for the first time in my life, I came across a person who seemed to know the Bible very, very, very, very well, and also completely and utterly rejected the idea that Jesus was God or that the Trinity was correct. And I had never encountered anybody who had, who could be so articulate about that. And I confess, it shook me. It shook me. And it didn't help that

when I started to try to look into the Bible myself, I couldn't find what I was looking for. Now, in hindsight, I realized I was looking for the wrong thing. I was probably looking for a flashing, all of a sudden, the Bible to have flashing lights to say, okay, George, this person is wrong. The Trinity is true. Jesus was from God. I was expecting something like that that was sort of very obvious. But here's the thing. Why did I not surrender to her argument? I didn't surrender to her argument because of tradition, because of the authority of other Christians.

Christians. I didn't know why she was wrong. But I trusted that, you know, when my pastor and other Christians who are older than me and have been Christians for a long time, when they say that this is what the Bible teaches and that this is what the churches believe for a long time, I trusted them.

Now, eventually, I was able to continue reading and study the Bible and understand why this person was completely wrong. The Bible does affirm that there is one God who exists in three persons, and the Bible does affirm that Jesus is fully and completely God. He is God, the Son of God, who's taken on human flesh, fully man and fully God. I came to see that. But what kept me from surrendering was tradition.

And I didn't grow up in a church that had creeds, but if I had, it would be creeds that would have helped. That's what the creeds teach. So you see, it's not that anything underneath the line is unimportant. It's just that there's this qualitative difference between them. And of course, this means that we, as Protestant Christians, have a major disagreement with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches who wouldn't accept that that's the thing. But I think that's what the Bible teaches, and I actually think that's the historic Christian faith that goes right back to the early church fathers.

There's another thing. Notice if you go back to your Bibles, look at what it says again in verse 4. For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.

[17:51] Now, Paul is speaking to, in the year 50-something, 55 or something like that, to Christians who live in Rome. And what he's saying is that when you're reading something which was written by King David a thousand years earlier, when you're reading something written by Moses, written 14 or 1500 years earlier, that was obviously something that instructed people in that day, but it's also something that instructs us. So if you could put up the third point, that would be very, one C, that would be helpful.

Only the triune God could and did speak a word which is relevant and necessary to every people group and every age. Only God could do that, and that's the claim of what God has done, to instruct us, to give us hope and encouragement, which we're going to get to in a moment. And so this is saying that whether you were a feudal Christian in feudal Germany hundreds and hundreds of years ago, whether you were a persecuted Christian worshipping in the catacombs in the year 200, whether you are a Christian today in Singapore, in Beijing, in Nairobi, you know, in Manhattan or in Ottawa, whether you are a people group in very, very, very rural part of the world where the farming techniques haven't changed very much in 200 years. When the Bible is read to you, it is a current and relevant work. It is expressing the real you and the real needs, the real human condition of you. And only God could write something like that, and that's the claim of the Bible. There's one final thing before we move on from the Bible. If you could put up the final point, that would be very helpful. One D, I should say, not the final point. Notice again in the text, if you go back, verse 5, 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. Now this text is a rebuke to a very prevalent Protestant illness. We need to, as Protestants, hear the rebuke of this text.

One of the great problems within Protestantism is that some people take it that all I need is this Bible and the Holy Spirit and the heck with everybody else. That's all I need. But this text is saying something far more profound. It's saying that we are to listen to the Bible, accepting its instruction, and seek in our understanding to be in harmony with our local church and the church around the world and the church throughout time. Now obviously that's hard for individuals to do, and it's one of the reasons you should hope that the ministers in your church are educated, and you should hope that I'm engaged in continuing education, that I'm trying to grow in the faith. You should hope that I'm reading books and listening to things that help me to understand how Christians around the world see things and how Christians throughout time. Hopefully, I mean, that's something you should be praying for me, and it's a very important thing to pray for. But you see, we tend to think of

this harmony as just something, okay, we all have to be in harmony, but that's not enough. I mean, and we can really see that in the whole Anglican crisis which is going on right now. I mean, one of the things that we can very, very truly say is that I can say with complete and utter confidence that when I talk about the

Bible and a whole range of things, there is a fundamental harmony between what I am preaching and what you would hear in Nigeria, what you would hear in Kenya, what you would hear in Rwanda, what you would hear in Venezuela, and in Chile, and in Manhattan, and in Southeast Asia, and in India. It's around the world. And this is also telling us that we need to humble ourselves and be willing to listen to Augustine, and Chrysostom, and Aquinas, and Calvin, and Cramner, as we're reading the Bible, that we need to, we need the help not only of Christians around the world to help us deal with our blind spots, but we need the help of Christians from earlier ages to help us to see those other historical blind spots that we have. Because the goal is that God, you see, it isn't, it isn't that when he's talking about this, that Paul is just referring to you and your little local church right this moment. There's this larger picture of what the church is. It's both local, it's also worldwide, and it's also throughout time. And by the way, that's one of the things which is so wonderful about the Christian faith.

We're going to talk about this in a moment, because I'm going to get into the whole topic of hope. Really, the sermon this day is really around two things, the Bible and hope. And I wanted to take time on the Bible, and I'm going to take time on hope. But one of the problems that we have in the modern world is that, well, everything just flows out of the current moment.

[23 : 25] And when everything just flows out of the current moment, it means that everything is ephemeral. It just comes and goes, it comes and goes, and comes and goes. And you can see within our culture that in many ways, people are addicted to that, but there's also this longing for something that has real roots, and that's bigger than just the current moment.

And to understand that, you know, when I stand up here to preach, to the best of my ability, I am trying to preach in fundamental harmony with Augustine, and Chrysostom, and Cramner, and Calvin, and obviously earlier, people more recent to that. And I'm trying to speak in harmony with how a godly Nigerian, or Kenyan, or Rwandan, or Chinese would speak. That's actually something very wonderful and powerful.

But that's what the church should be at its best. Now, as I said, many, many people thinking about Christians don't necessarily think of Christians as, in fact, many people would say that the Bible is not hopeful.

That it's, that it says hard words to people in our culture and offends them. And, um, the fact of the matter is, is the Bible does offend people.

And, uh, it's offended me many times throughout my Christian life. And, in fact, the matter is, if you just think about it for a moment, if the Bible never offended you, then that earlier part that's so wonderful about the Bible, that it's, we're trying to understand the Bible in harmony with Chrysostom, and Augustine, and Calvin, and Cramner.

[25 : 09] And today, if, if, if nothing in the Bible ever offended us, it would mean that we're purely and utterly reading an imaginary text, which is, uh, has as much root as the latest TikTok.

I don't even know what the word is for a TikTok. It was a video, whatever a TikTok is. A TikTok. Um, but let's just see. The Bible actually really is, is hopeful. And, and let's look at why.

Read, uh, continue reading at verse 7. So, it's, it's gone all through what the Bible is, and how God, uh, wants us to be in harmony and glorify God. And then it has this word, therefore.

Something follows from all of this. Verse 7. Therefore, welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ Jesus became a servant to the circumcised, that's Jewish people, to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.

And then he's going to give a long list of Bible quotes that sort of back up what he just has to say. But, um, but here's the, here's the thing which is very, very powerful about what he's just said, and why it is that the Bible is ultimately a profound word of encouragement.

[26 : 22] If you could put up the, the point number two, Claire, that would be helpful. And I'm playing a little bit of a, I've sort of changed the words a little bit from a hymn, an old hymn, and that's why some words are in quotes.

God's grace comes to you in Christ, so that saved, welcomed, and hopeful you will be. Look at verse seven.

It's such a powerful image of what Jesus does for us on the cross. It says here, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. So last week I, I mentioned a movie that I'd seen, uh, called, um, uh, The Woman of the Hour, and I said it's a very, very, very well done movie, from my humble opinion, uh, very well done, great script, spectacular acting, and because of that it's deeply disturbing.

So don't watch it unless you want to be deeply disturbed, because it's about a, a serial killer who's figured out how to prey on women and kill them. Um, but I can tell you, I'm going to give a, a movie analogy today, and this is a movie, if you're looking for a good movie to watch, look up the movie, have to make sure you get the title, uh, uh, right?

Look at the movie, um, uh, One Life. One Life. It stars Anthony Hopkins, and it tells the true story, or it's inspired, more or less tells the true story, of a fellow, uh, a British banker, a young British banker, who through a series of circumstances was in Czechoslovakia after it was under Nazi control.

[28 : 03] So the Second World War hadn't started, but the Nazis had annexed Czechoslovakia, and they were in charge of it. And while he's there, he's a single man, not married, uh, no kids, just lived with his mom, and, uh, he gets struck by the evil of the Nazi empire, and he gets, his heart just gets broken by the children, the Jewish children.

And so he goes on to, he ends up single-handedly, well, he begins, he's the start, of getting people involved, uh, locals and, and, and everything, so that, uh, so that children, Jewish, mainly Jewish children, could be taken from Czechoslovakia and come to England to be welcomed.

He ends up saving the life of 669 kids, 669 children. Now, it's not an easy thing to get children under the Nazi empire out of Czechoslovakia and into England.

He has to organize a team in Czechoslovakia. He has to organize all sorts of ways to create false, like, identity papers that will pass the scrutiny of the Nazis.

He has to organize, uh, adults who will accompany these children for the long journey from Czechoslovakia to England. He has to provide money.

[29 : 31] He has to find people in England who will welcome the children when they come. He has to get permission from the British government to give visas. There's a lot of work. But at the end of that work, a child is identified and located and given all of the documents that's needed and all of the money and adult supervision and clothing and is brought safely from somewhere in Czechoslovakia to England where they get off the train and are welcomed by British parents.

There's lots, lots of emotion in the movie. Very, very well done. And there's some more other things later on that are quite something. So what this text is saying is that when you look at Jesus dying on the cross, what you see is God doing everything that needed to be done so that he would welcome a sinner, lost person like you into his presence, saved and welcomed.

That's what's happening on the cross. And we don't understand all of the things that God had to do for that to be happened. Take a person like me so that I can be welcomed by Christ and welcomed into his presence, welcomed as a saved individual.

But everything that had to be done was done by Christ so that I and you could be welcomed. And this welcome is a powerful welcome.

It's a powerful image to understand what God is doing for you in the person of his son. And it's a welcome that just like in that story, as I said, on the life of Nicholas Winton, that's the fellow, everything is done, even the carrying of the kids to England.

[31 : 16] There's nothing those kids can do. They just have to be completely carried. And that's what Christ did for us. And then, of course, for Christians, as that story of the fact that Christ has welcomed me becomes more real to me, then obviously I have to be a person who learns to welcome others.

That's why hospitality is so important for Christians. It should be. And that's, you see, why the Bible is such at the end of the day, even when it contradicts us, even when it offends us, it offends us to connect us.

It offends us to get our attention so we will understand our need to be welcomed to God through the person of Jesus and what he's done. If you could put up the third point, and if you would just, the third point, I'm not going to read the other, the different prophecy texts from the Bible that sort of balances out.

You can read it yourself, what Paul has been talking about. But it comes with this prayer at the end. 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.

That's the message of the text. I mean, I'm going to try to just ground that for us a little bit. But that's, if you, I mean, this is a great verse to memorize.

[32 : 41] It's a great verse to pray. It's in the form of a prayer. This is a great way for us to pray over each other, for you to pray over me and for me to pray over you.

For, you know, if you're an aunt or an uncle and you have nephews and nieces, for you to pray over your aunts and your nephews and your nieces is pray that the God of hope will fill whoever, you know, and you can just say for the youth, you know, that they'll fill Louise.

You'll fill Emma if I'm praying. You'll fill Tommy with all joy and peace in believing. And in the original language, it's not just believing, believing. It's believing in Jesus. It's obvious in the original language.

You know, I can pray, Father, you're the God of hope. Will you fill with all joy and peace in believing Tommy, Emma, Louise, Gordy, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, each one of these people that I have mentioned may abound in hope.

That's what the Bible is telling us to do here. And it's helped us to understand that when we read the Bible, we're to hear it as a word of hope to us and encouragement. Now, what is hope?

[33 : 49] If you could put up the point 4A. Generally, generally, when Canadians speak about hope, they don't really mean what the Bible is talking about hope because most Canadian Christians speak like Canadians.

And what Canadians mean when they talk about hope is basically a type of optimism. It's a type of wish. But here's the problem. Optimism is rooted in the world of one dang thing after another.

But biblical hope is rooted in the triune God. You can read a very complicated book talking about imminent frames and transcendent frames and all of that type of stuff.

But when they use all that complicated language, they really just mean you're living out of a world and an understanding that the world is just one dang thing after another. You see, here's the difference is that if you're just sort of wishing that this is going to happen, I hope, you know, I hope I get that promotion.

I hope that I live a very, very healthy life until, you know, I'm in my 90s. I hope I have lots of money. I hope I can get a house. Like, all of these things are wishes and all of them ultimately come out of a framework and an understanding of how the world works, which is just the world which is one dang thing after another.

[35 : 11] And so they're, they have no substance. They have no root. They're just my assertive willpower. But all I see is a world that's one dang thing after another.

And what we desire, what human beings desire, I mean, the fact of the matter is is that without hope we wither and die. Human beings need hope. And it's a weird thing.

Nobody ever stops with us, say to themselves, I don't know, like ants don't need hope.

Cockroaches don't need hope. Worms don't need hope. Why is it that human beings need hope?

Why is it that when you're talking to a person, you can see that their hopes that they had have been completely and utterly crushed?

All of this is saying that there's something about human beings and how they were wired that we human beings need hope. And the hope that we need cannot just be a hope that comes from one dang thing after another.

We're looking for a hope that's transcendent, that's rooted in something transcendent and eternal and bigger. And that's exactly what the Bible is talking about in hope.

[36 : 18] Biblical hope is rooted in the triune God. If you could put up the next point, because this is what biblical hope means. While time and circumstance dash human hopes, the triune God wants you to know his promises to you and to know that he will always keep his promises.

The Christian virtue of hope isn't just that things are going to get better. I mean, I don't know if we'll, probably won't come up in the prayers. I have no idea what it means that looks like Assad has fallen in Syria.

I have no idea whether that means there's going to be greater peace in the Middle East over the next five years. or given the role of Iran and Russia in propping up and Hezbollah in propping up Assad and given that it seems as if it might be Islamists that have taken over, if that's going to unleash a far greater war that will spread.

I have no idea. Zero idea. Any one of you think you know, you don't know. You don't know. You're just trying to be optimistic or pessimistic.

but real hope that the Bible is talking about is that God has made promises to you and me and He wants us to know those promises and He wants us to start to live out of those promises.

[37 : 40] That's where encouragement comes from. That's where encouragement comes from. That's where that's where you and I need to be rooted.

So I'm just going to close. If you could put up the 4C, that would be. I'd like you all to stand for a second because I want to say something to you and I want to speak it over you. I want you to hear this and if you're at home watching, I ask you to stand.

Get off the couch or wherever you're sitting and stand for a moment because this is not me with my optimism addressing you. I want you to hear what the Bible is in effect saying over you right now. And the first one is this. In His grace, at this moment, Jesus Christ, if you're in Christ, if you're in His grace, at this moment, Jesus Christ has welcomed you.

Yes, the real you. You might say, I don't know, George, does He know how much porn I consumed this week? Does He know how crappy my finances are?

[38 : 45] Does He know that I'm worried that I'll never have a house of my own? Does He know how disappointed I am about how I chose these things and not other things and how I'm ruining my life? Does He know about the terrible, the way I talk to my kids?

Does He know about all of it? Yes. You see, Jesus did everything that had to be done. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit did everything that had to be done so that when you, the real you, the real you standing here right now at this moment, when you gave your life to Christ, He knew all of that and He welcomed you.

He dealt with it. And so God wants you to know that promise, that promise that as you stand here right now, you might be feeling optimistic, you might be feeling pessimistic, you might be feeling complete and utter despair and God wants you to hear the scriptures that you've given your life to Christ and that means right now as you're standing here, He has welcomed you.

The real you. And let me tell you, it's only as you come to understand that He has welcomed you that you have a place to stand to deal with the crap in your life.

Because if you don't have that strong place, you have no basis to deal with the crap in your life. You're going to tell yourself fairy tales about yourself. You're going to drink more. You're going to do porn more.

[40 : 16] You're going to gamble more because you want to numb yourself. Only understanding that Christ has welcomed you gives you a place to stand to deal with those things. And so the Bible wants you to understand right now and hope that's how He looks at you.

And me. And one more thing for hope. To put up the final point that would be good. In His grace, at the moment of your death, your eyes will close to this world.

But, in Christ, your eyes will open to see the new earth. And you will see Christ Jesus Himself look you in the eye and welcome you.

that's what the Scripture promises. You might get old. You might get forgotten. Nobody knows who you are. Maybe you're going to die alone.

I don't know. I can't promise you that you're not going to have those things happen. Maybe you'll be in pain. Maybe you won't. I don't know. I can't promise you those things. I don't know. The whole world is one dang thing after another. But what I can tell you is that there is an eternal and transcendent hope and that when you give your life to Christ, that is your end.

[41 : 30] your eyes will close. But the moment that they close on this world, they will open in the new earth, the new heaven and the new earth.

And you will see Jesus. And He will look you right in the eye. And He will welcome you. That is your end in Christ. Let's pray that each other will learn to live out of those promises in the Scripture.

Father, I ask that your Holy Spirit would come with gentle power upon each one of us. We ask, Father, that you would help us to pray these prayers over each other about encouragement and hope.

We ask that you would create us as individuals more and more to be formed by hope, to believe your promises that they're true, that that would characterize us as a church, that it would characterize how we deal with our kids and how we deal with stuff in our own lives and how we look at money and how we look at sex and how we look at power and how we look around us.

Father, that this profound hope that you offer us in Christ, that we would be more and more people, individuals, and as a group that are rooted and grounded in hope.

[42 : 44] And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.