

The God of Hope

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[0 : 0 0] So this year our Advent series, sermon series is on hope and tonight we're going to see how hope is explained in Romans 15. So let's jump straight to verse 13. It should come up on your screen here momentarily.

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.

It's a cracker of a scripture, isn't it? But what's it saying? Well it's saying very simply, God wants to fill you with hope. So the first question we should ask ourselves is, what is hope? What is hope?

So okay, what is hope? Well let's start I think by making a distinction between Christian hope and optimism. Optimism is looking at the odds of a possible future event or reality and choosing to believe that things will probably work out in your favor.

That's optimism and it's a great attitude. It's helpful to be optimistic in life. But Christian hope is something different. Christian hope doesn't look at the odds.

[1 : 1 2] Christian hope looks at what God has promised about the future and builds a life on that. Christian hope is confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it.

And in that sense, Christian hope is very, very reasonable, isn't it? Because it's always very reasonable to trust a trustworthy person. Let me make another distinction between Christian hope and how we typically use the word hope.

Just regular old hope. Regular old hope has a good chunk of doubt in it. And that's the big difference, isn't it? Because how we normally use the word hope, we might say something like, I hope it snows.

We were just talking about it before the service. I hope it snows before Christmas Day. Or I hope I get a retro gaming system for Christmas.

And I'm just going to say that one one more time to no one in particular listening at home. I really hope I get a retro gaming system for Christmas to play old school games with my children.

[2 : 2 4] Now, of course, there's a lot of doubt there, isn't there? Because Christmas is in the future. It hasn't happened. So good chunks are doubt right there. In the Bible, Christian hope is always more certain, though, because simply God knows and controls the future.

All that to say, when Paul prays that we would abound in hope, he's not praying that we would become a more optimistic people. He's not praying for more regular old hope. You know, fingers crossed, the hope the world sorts itself out.

No, he is praying that we would trust in what God says about the future. And surely that's something that we all want as Christians.

But how does that Christian hope come to us? If we want it, what's the mechanism for that getting into us? And there we'll go to verse 4. Verse 4.

So there's your answer.

[3 : 28] The Holy Spirit communicates hope through the scriptures. The Bible speaks into our hearts. It speaks into our intellect. And it's brilliant, isn't it?

The Holy Spirit hardwires us to hope. It's like something we catch when we go deep into God's word.

Now you see an example of this happening in our passage today. Paul here quotes sort of three or four verses. And so we're talking about verses 9 to 12. Paul jumps into the Old Testament and quotes scripture after scripture after scripture.

Verse 9. As it is written, therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, etc. Verse 10. And again it is said, rejoice, O Gentiles, etc. Verse 11. And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles.

Verse 12. And again, Isaiah says, the root of Jesse, etc. So we've been talking quite generally about hope. Now what I want to do is I want us to dive into Romans 15.

[4 : 29] What's the hope that Paul is trying to instill in this particular church through these scriptures about Gentiles being in the community of God?

So we need a bit of context. Here's the context. So the church in Rome was divided, right? Which explains Paul's blessing in verse 5. He says, That explains the blessing.

The church was divided. Paul obviously wants the church to be unified. So what does he do? He doesn't just go, oh look, come on guys. Come on man.

Can you just get along with each other? No, he doesn't do that. He doesn't just say, try harder. But Paul, he goes huge. He goes huge. He goes to the great plan for the world in scripture.

He furnishes their imagination with the future God has for his people. Which is one day we will be a community where there is no death, no arguments, no power plays, no loneliness, no prejudice.

[5 : 43] People of all nations worshipping God united under Christ. That's God's plan for the world. That's what our future will look like.

So these people in this church in Rome having some dramas and Paul says, God told you long ago what your future will look like. That's the scriptures verses 9 to 12.

And it will be amazing. And you might respond there by saying, well that's great that the future is going to be great. But how does that help this church in Rome? How does it help me?

What about the problems we have right now? What does hope do for us? Well here's the thing about hope. It does this amazing thing. Hope actually changes us now. It's not just nice feelings about the future.

Hope leans into the future and pulls it back into the present. And it changes us. Imagine you have two miners trapped in a cave. They're trapped in different places.

[6 : 41] Somehow the rescuers get a message to one of the miners trapped in some location in that cave system. And says to that miner, we're coming to get you 100%. We'll be there within an hour.

No problems at all. That miner's experience of their situation will be very different to the other miner. That miner will know what they're going through is not permanent.

The best is ahead of them. They might even experience some joy in the midst of a very difficult situation. They might start packing things up, putting their gear together, getting ready to go.

When hope begins to operate in our life, it changes us. Paul in this chapter gives us an illustration of this, gives us an example of it.

If you go to the top of the chapter, just look at just verse 1 of the top of the chapter. I'll read it to you. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

[7 : 44] So at the start, I said there was a drama in this church. Let me get quite specific here. So the drama was this. It was a mix of Jews and Gentiles. There were arguments about holy days. There were arguments about whether they should drink alcohol or not, that kind of thing.

So Paul, previous to this chapter, had said, look, some of you feel free to drink. Others don't feel like you should do that. So for those of you who think it's okay to do that, that's going to be really confusing if you do it around folks who don't think you should be drinking.

So just don't drink around them. That's Paul's first kind of tack at dealing with that. Then he applies hope to their hearts.

And he does that by talking about the scriptures in 9 to 12, which we've already talked about. These scriptures all references to Gentiles being part of God's plan. It's like Paul is grabbing their eyeballs and he's yanking them up and he's saying, here's God's great plan for the future.

A diverse community united around Christ, caring for one another. That's the great hope, but it's not just the future. Paul says you can experience some of that now.

[8 : 51] I want you to experience some of this now. Lean into that future. Pull it into the now. That hope we have, it can change us now. God will one day unify his world.

But until then, let that hope hardwire your heart to be relationally more generous now. So the strong supports the weak, even when the weak are annoying.

That's kind of the basic, that's Paul's basic argument. You've been given a future, a vision for the future. Live it out now as best we can. That's his big sort of plan.

That's his big argument in Romans 15. Now, I'm going to finish here. Hope works a bit like gratefulness, I think.

Gratefulness looks to the past and it pulls it into the now. And that gratefulness changes us. Verse 7 is an example of this. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.

[9 : 54] Your past experience with Christ changes how you treat people now, how you conduct yourself in the world. Hope works like that, except it doesn't look backwards.

It looks forwards. Hope looks forwards. Hope opens your eyes to this invisible future, a future God has promised. And as that hope gets into your bones, it doesn't make you dreamy and useless.

No, it does the opposite. Hope makes us more like Christ. It changes the way we engage with people. It changes the way we be in the world.

That's what comes from hope. So if you are short on hope, the problem is not that you're just a bit more pessimistic than you are optimistic, like it's a caricature you're born with.

No, that is not the problem. The problem is your imagination has not been furnished with the promises of God. So, go into his word, get hope, and you'll see what it does to your heart.

[10 : 55] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.