

Hope

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Date: 01 December 2019

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[0 : 00] Bibles to Romans chapter 15 and verse 13. Just one verse, but... Now, of course, just before I read this, I'm going to say something obvious, but sometimes when you say something obvious, people go, well, actually, it wasn't that obvious.

Thank you for telling me. And that is that as we consider hope, we consider hope not entirely different than those who considered hope before Christ's first advent.

So we have hope for a second advent and what's tied up with that. But the hope that God's people had for the first advent, you've got to remember that they didn't know when it was going to happen. They didn't know when Christ was going to come in the same way we don't know when Christ will come again. But now for us is a church, is a God's people on earth.

We've already witnessed, at least in the scriptures, Christ having come. So all of those things that were hoped for before Christ came the first time have already been fulfilled.

[1 : 28] He came, he lived, he served, he died on the cross, taking away our sin. He rose from the dead. All of those hopes have been fulfilled.

And therefore, as we reflect back on them, we don't share in the same kind of hope in the same way. Because, you know, we know, you know, when we read about the crucifixion, we can't help but read it in the knowledge of knowing what comes next.

You know, the resurrection. But at the time of Christ's crucifixion, they didn't, you know, there were doubts over the resurrection. Even when Christ had risen from the dead, even in the Great Commission, some people still doubted even though they saw him.

So how does our hope work? Well, in the same way, I'd like us to think about Advent, the first Advent. But I'd like us also to remember that we are set up to receive the second Advent.

So with that in mind, we have this one verse in Romans chapter 15 and verse 13, which says this. In fact, let me read from verse 9.

[2 : 40] And in order for 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 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. Now, of course, that's Jesus. And now here for all of us, 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.

Another way of that, if you were to read it in the Greek, it would be may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. The believing is an active trust in Christ.

So may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing as you trust in him, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.

[3 : 53] It's that simple. It's that simple. We'll come back to that after this next hymn. Amen. Well, as we come this morning to our first Sunday of Advent, it seems obvious again to say that we can thank God for sending the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we can look forward and give God thanks ahead of time for him sending Jesus Christ a second time. So we live in between the Advents, the first Advent, and the second Advent, and we look forward to Christ bringing all things to their end, all things to the fulfillment of everything.

One of my favorite verses out of Ephesians is that in the end, of course, Christ wins, but in the end, Christ will reconcile all things in heaven and on earth.

There is no defeatist mentality. There is nothing to not look forward to, as though everything's going, you know, down the pan.

We thank God for the future that he has planned, ordained. And, of course, we hear the words of Lamentations that says, be careful how you interpret the signs of the times.

[5 : 24] Now, because Jesus is coming again in the same way he came a first time, this creates a certain type of hope in the people of God. And the hope that we have is not just focused on one thing.

It's focused on one person, but not on one thing. When you read about hope in the scriptures and the things that are promised, there are many things that we're hoping for.

But all of those things that we are hoping for, we are hoping in Christ for them. So we have to make a distinction between, and this is what we'll get to, who we're hoping in and what we're hoping for. So the hope that God promises us contains many blessings, multiple blessings. And, of course, because we're hoping for them, we put our hand up and acknowledge that they've not all arrived yet.

We sit here in the assurance that we have forgiveness of sins. We sit here in the assurance that we will one day be with God without being in a corrupt world.

[6 : 33] We know that all of these things will come in, but at the same time, we know we don't have them yet. And so Paul is saying, may the God of hope, may the God of hope fill you with joy and peace.

There's no reason why he shouldn't. But may the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in your believing, in your trusting of him.

And so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may then abound in hope. In other words, the God of hope is transferring his hope onto you. Okay, the God of hope in this verse is, that's who he is, and he's trying to give you that hope.

And the way that he gives you that hope is, firstly, by you believing, and secondly, by it being affirmed in you by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you may abound in hope.

So the God of hope is giving you something. So as you think about that, I want you to recognize that hope is as much of a gift as the things that you're hoping for.

[7 : 41] Okay, hope itself, biblical hope, is as much of a gift as all of those other things that you're hoping for. And that's what I guess I want you to understand as we begin.

The reason I do is because all of those other things are dependent on that hope. They're all dependent on us having that gift in the first place.

If God doesn't give us the gift of hope, then we have nothing to look forward to. Absolutely nothing to look forward to. The gift of hope is sort of like the down payment, the guarantee of everything else that's coming our way.

Now, okay, we may have to wait an extremely long time to receive it, but it is coming. You will get it. God of hope is giving you that hope so that you can be absolutely assured this morning that what he promised you will get.

And therefore, I think it would be advisable for us as a church, as a congregation, to sit here and ask a few basic questions. Firstly, what is hope? Because I think a lot of people focus on what you're hoping for rather than what actually hope is in the first place.

[9 : 02] God is giving us a gift of hope, and I think it's just fair to say, well, let's sit down and ask, what is that gift? Let's unpack it and see what it is that God has given us.

The second thing we need to do is, well, how does it work? If God has given us something, how does hope work? Can I not understand it and therefore not benefit from this gift?

And then, of course, what's tied to that is the most important question, perhaps, and that is, what do you hope in? In order to receive what you're hoping for. What do you hope in in order to receive what you're hoping for?

Now, that's the key question. Hoping for something is not the same as hoping in something. Okay? Just let that sink in.

Hoping for something, that is the result, that is something to come your way, is not the same as what you're hoping in in order to get that thing that you are wanting.

[10 : 08] So that's the basic distinction that we are meant to understand here. The other thing that we're also to understand is that God's hope is never deferred.

We tend to think that it might be because we're waiting a long time and God is keeping us waiting a long time, but his hope is never deferred.

There's a delayed gratification, which is what you find in Proverbs. You know, one of the things that the dad and the mom in Proverbs has to teach their child before they get to 15 is the importance of delayed gratification.

Listen, son, there are some things you cannot have until you're older. Listen, you've just got to wait for them. They don't, you can't get them, you know, some things you'd simply have to wait for them to arrive or to grow.

And there's a big difference between a deferred hope and a delayed gratification. There's much in the scriptural text that Jesus preaches in the Sermon on the Mount that is delayed gratification.

[11:16] You know, you are meant as Christians to store up your treasure as much as you can.

That's what Jesus says. Go and store your treasure up as much as you can, but make sure you do it in heaven, not on earth.

Store it up, but store it up in the right place. There's a delayed gratification. You'll get to enjoy it, but you get to enjoy it at a much later date.

That type of thinking is one that we're not used to. And I think the way that the world has gone, and that I can remember talking to a furniture designer, and he said, when we started out, we used to build furniture that would last 25 years.

Then we realized that most customers change their settee in their seats after five years, so why make something that can last 25 years if they're going to get rid of it in five? Let's just buy cheaper material, make it to last five years.

So there's a mentality out there is, well, I'll just have this, and I'll move on to the next thing. Nobody wants to wait. Nobody wants to have something that lasts, it seems, because I'll want something different soon.

[12:28] And nobody wants to wait. And we tend to think, well, that's just the way the world thinks. It won't affect us. Of course it affects you. Most of the adverts you see on TV are having some kind of influence on you that has a knock-on effect to how you hope, how you trust, how you, what you, we can't help but be shaped a bit by the world around us, even though we're told not to be conformed.

We're told not to be conformed because it's happening. Okay? Do not be conformed to this world. We're told for that, we're told not to let that happen because it is happening, not because we're, you know, in a position where it could not happen to us because we're a Christian.

It does happen. So the idea of hope is that God has promised and in that promise is attached to it your purpose of waiting.

hope and waiting seem to go hand in hand. And because God holds everything together by the power of his word, we recognize that everything has its place and there is a place for everything.

Okay? There's a place for everything and everything has its place. You know, I'm not of the conviction and I hope you're not that there are some things in this world that God is just not God's finger on, that God's just not in control of.

[13:56] Now, the blessing of that is, is, well, God can be trusted with everything. The difficulty with that is, is, why am I having to put up with this now then?

Right? If God has, if God has got his finger on everything, if God has taken care of everything, the blessing is, this is wonderful, I can trust him. The difficulty is, why aren't things different?

Like, why aren't things different? Hope, then, is to tell us that they're going to be different. But you, you're on delayed gratification.

You just have to sit back and wait this one out. So, firstly, what is hope? Well, hope, if properly understood, if you read it in the scriptures and if you see it for yourself, hope is where you recognize that something is missing.

Hope is an acknowledgement that something is missing. We need this, we don't have it, and I hope that it'll come soon.

[14:58] We need the forgiveness of sins, we don't have it, and I hope that it'll come soon. We need reconciliation, we need a new world, we need a lot of things that we don't have. Hope causes you to see, the gift of hope that God gives you causes you to see what we're missing, what we don't have.

So, if you're hoping, you're hoping for things that you don't have. You're hoping for things that you don't see yet. You know that they're coming, but you're able to look in the world and look in your life and look in the people around you and go, we don't have it at the moment.

Now, God's hope is entirely different than the world's hope because God's hope comes with a guarantee. The God of hope guarantees that you will get what he promises you.

But when the world hopes, it kind of hopes like a wishful thinking. We don't know how things are going to turn up, let's just hope for the best. And what they're doing is they're hoping for the best, but they're not hoping in anything for the best.

They're hoping for it, but when you ask them the simple question, and what are you hoping in for that to happen? Well, I'm just hoping for it to happen. But hoping for something to happen is entirely different than hoping in someone for it to happen.

[16:17] You know, and this is something that we really ought to just sit back and pay attention. When people were waiting for the advent of Christ, that is the first advent of Christ, they were not just waiting for Christ.

They were waiting for lots of things, the kingdom of God to come. They were waiting for peace on earth, joy on earth. They were waiting for forgiveness. They were waiting for the reality of salvation. All of those things that they were waiting for were fulfilled in Christ. So I'm waiting for all those things, but I recognize that they will come in Jesus.

So how do I expect to receive all those things that I'm hoping for? By hoping in the person who brings them. So who am I hoping in to fulfill what I'm hoping for?

Okay, who am I hoping in to fulfill what I'm hoping for? You know, and that's just the way hope works. Hope doesn't work by hoping for things.

[17:24] Hope only works if you're hoping in something or someone for the thing that you're hoping for. I hope she'll do that.

I hope he will do that. Okay, we understand that it's dependent on something. So all of these things like salvation and blessing and the second advent of Christ and the future to come and just the glorious future that we have, the golden age, as Edwards put it.

Okay, who am I trusting to bring that? who am I hoping in to make sure we have those things? Because if I trust in those things, they're not going to come.

I have to trust in someone to bring them. Hope then is firstly a recognition that you don't have it yet. And secondly, it is a recognition that it is a gift from God that causes you to recognize that you don't have it yet.

And therefore, you ought to trust him for it. Hope is an acknowledgement that you don't have it yet, but at the same time, you're in no doubt that you won't receive it in the future.

[18:33] That's what hope is. Hope is an acknowledgement of saying, I will have it, but I don't have it yet. It is guaranteed that I will have it, but I don't have it yet.

That's what hope is. It's missing. I know how it'll come, but I must wait and I must wait patiently. So how does hope work?

How does it actually work for the Christian? Well, this question of what do you hope in in order to receive what you're hoping for must be answered by you.

As a Christian believer, you must answer that very simple question. Who am I hoping in to receive what I am hoping for? Any other type of hope is a form of wishful thinking.

that it's just going to turn up just by thinking about it a lot. Now that just isn't the case.

[19:32] God expects us to look to him, to believe in him, to trust in him for all of these other things that come with him. That very little word, in Christ, in, is such a powerful, meaningful word in the New Testament because it basically says that everything that comes with Christ can only be received in Christ.

You get them in Christ. You get the forgiveness of sins. Where? In Christ. You get the promised future. Where? In Christ. You get reconciliation.

In Christ. All of these, all of these things are found in a person. So to put this, perhaps, say, another way, we may hope for some things, you know, on an earthly scale that depend on other things happening first, other people making sure that they do it.

Now, of course, I grew up in a home where at Christmas time it was difficult, but you had your hopes. And it took me years later to realize that what I was hoping for was a terrible burden.

Not that I didn't know this at the time, but all those things that I was hoping for was a terrible burden on the person whom they rested. Because, right, I'm hoping for this, I'm hoping for that.

[20:56] You know, you've got seven boys sat around, mum saying, what would you like for Christmas? What are you hoping to receive for Christmas? And not one of us made the connection,

well, who am I hoping in to receive what I'm hoping for?

But poor old mum, there she was, you know, and you get yourself into debt one Christmas, you pay it off by the next one only to do it all over again. The debt burden of hope is huge.

Well, God carries that debt burden. God fulfills those hopes because he's got the currency to do it. He's got the power and the wisdom to do it. But people don't.

And so you can put your trust in a person and it not turn up because you recognize, especially at Christmas and children ought to recognize, you know, that those things that you're hoping for, that that guy in a red suit with a white beard, okay, you can put your trust in him if you like, but I can guarantee nothing's going to turn up.

okay, and you understand that as well. What you hope in determines what you're hoping for. I want to just let that settle in your head and your heart.

[22 : 10] What you're hoping in determines what you're hoping for. In other words, is this person able to do it? Right? And disappointment happens because you hope for something and then you're disappointed because you don't have it and then when you make the connection that, you know, why didn't you get it from me for Christmas?

You know, what, right? Because you don't understand the pressure, you know, children especially don't understand the pressure on a mum, on a dad, on parents that comes with hopes.

The pressure's just gigantic at times. And so what do you do? Well, in the same way, we ought to recognize that it's totally useless just to hope.

Just to hope for things. I hope tomorrow will be a better day. No. God controls every weather pattern. We hope in God that it'll be a better day tomorrow.

Okay? Like, you know, I hope that it's even the little things, I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow. Well, I hope it doesn't rain, that doesn't make any sense.

[23 : 23] Now, if you said, I hope in God that it doesn't rain tomorrow, now that makes sense because God is the one who can cause it either to rain or not to rain. But simply to say, I hope it doesn't rain doesn't make any sense.

I hope things will be different in the future. It doesn't make any sense. Somebody has to make it happen. And the hope that God gives us is God saying, I'm the God of, I make it happen.

This is why you're to trust in me. This is why you are to believe in me. And so God determines what we hope for as well because he's able to bring it about.

this is biblical hope. It's an acknowledgement of what's missing. It's an acknowledgement of what God has promised. But it's also an acknowledgement that God can actually make it happen.

That God can actually bring all those things about. And many of the things that we hope for can be deferred by people simply because they do not have the resources to do it now.

[24 : 29] You know, how many times have we seen even in the political world where promises are made and then budget cuts happen and suddenly you realize, well, you promised it.

Yeah, but we ought to take every human promise with a pinch of salt simply because God upholds everything by the power of his word, not people.

We can't make anything happen or not happen. It comes down to God. You know, read Lamentations 3. It depends entirely on him.

So we think that the powers of cause and effect are in our hands and they're really not. It's in the hands of God. So God sets our hopes and then he says, I will pay for them.

Okay, the reason you're going to have a beautiful future, the reason you're going to have blessing upon blessing is because I've paid for it. I can fulfill it.

[25 : 31] I can make sure that you have it. How then do we cope with this idea of delayed gratification? Well, as I said, there's a big difference between a deferred hope and a delayed gratification.

A deferred hope is when you put your trust in someone in order for something and then all of a sudden they're unable to fulfill it. You know, well, I was hoping that you would be able to do it.

Yeah, but I just didn't have the time. I was hoping you'd be able to pay for it. Yes, but this month I just don't have the money. You have a deferred hope. In other words, you're just going to have to wait until next month.

You're going to have to wait a few more weeks before I can give you what I owe you, perhaps. So you may hope that you get something of someone in a certain time and they might, they just might be able to do it but they might not be as well.

And so they have to defer your hope. Delayed gratification is entirely different because God isn't saying, I can't send Jesus at this time, I don't have the resources to do so.

[26 : 42] I don't have the manpower. I can't make good on my promises at this moment because I don't have the currency to pay for it. I just can't do it. No, everything is planned and therefore if you're waiting, it's not because it's been deferred because God can't do it now.

It's rather because it's not meant for now. Okay, delayed gratification is not a deferred hope. It may feel like a deferred hope as though God should have done this by now but he hasn't.

Perhaps something's gotten his way. Perhaps something has stopped him. No, that's not the way that it works. Delayed gratification assures us that God is in complete control and Jesus came at exactly the right time that he was meant to.

If you read Romans, Jesus didn't come sooner than he was meant to. He didn't come later than he was meant to. But at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Exactly at the right time that God wanted that to happen, it happened.

It's not a deferred hope as though Christ could have done it 2,000 years earlier but he couldn't because of certain political issues on earth. No, that's not the way that it was.

[27 : 53] Delayed gratification. God has a time in which he will do something and hope means that we have to cope with waiting. Waiting is not nice.

It's not easy. Everything that God does is a product of his wise planning. That's why we don't lose hope. We don't lose hope. If it was a deferred, then we could lose hope because we could say something like, well, if you couldn't make it happen this time, how can I believe that you'll make it happen next time?

How can I trust you? If I trusted you for it to happen this year, how can I trust you, God, for it to happen next year? You might just defer it again. No, God is not a God of deferred hope.

He's a God of delayed gratification. He has his time, but he doesn't defer anything. That's why we can continue to hope in him because everything turns up on time.

As we consider the promises of God and the promises that he has made, the Old and the New Testament fit together as promises made and promises kept. Promises made and promises kept.

[29 : 05] But even in the New Testament, you have promises made and promises are still yet to be kept. Okay? Christ is going to come again, the second advent, and that's a promise that we can be absolutely guaranteed God will keep because he keeps his promises.

But it hasn't happened yet. It will, but not yet. So what does it mean in terms of learning how to wait? Well, if you've got to wait anyway, if you can't make it happen, you have to wait anyway.

So it's probably wise to learn how to wait. It's probably wise to take it on board to understand why perhaps God is even causing us to wait.

And God isn't just making you wait, by the way. He's making me wait right alongside with you. God is making us all wait. We're all in this same boat when it comes to waiting.

You know, well, can you not just do this thing for me? You know, like a child coming to the kitchen, you know, 45 minutes before tea time, can I just have a biscuit just to get me? No, just wait.

[30 : 17] We will all eat at the same time because as a parent, you know, if you give a biscuit to one and suddenly you've got four other children running into the kitchen and can I have a biscuit or can I have a biscuit as well and then, and suddenly you think, oh my gosh, I'm a bit peckish and everybody eats and then you, right?

You can understand we're all in the same, we're all in the same boat. God wants us to learn how to wait and one of the ways that he does that is to reassure us of what hope is.

It is a guarantee of the future. It is a gift that guarantees you of the future. It is an acknowledgement you don't have it yet but at the same time it is an absolute guarantee that you will have it.

So here's a few considerations as we close. When we sing, as we have done this morning, that Jesus Christ is the hope of the nations, you really ought to believe that.

you really ought to sit here and go, yes, that's true. There's nothing else worth hoping in in order to receive what I'm hoping for.

[31 : 23] There's no other person worth hoping in in order to receive what I'm hoping for. Hope cannot stand on its own two feet. Hope has to be in someone.

Christ can stand on his own two feet. Hope in hoping can't stand up but hope in Christ does stand up.

Hoping in Christ is hoping in someone who can make it happen. Okay, we live in a world where I would like to see lots of things happen that I believe are written in the scriptural text but at the same time I have to acknowledge that they may not happen for another 500 years or a thousand years or, I mean, because I don't know when Christ will come again, okay, I could be in that period of time where I don't actually get to see any of it but not seeing it doesn't mean that it won't happen. It just means that it isn't going to happen in my lifetime. I can remember growing up being taken to Sunday school by a very strict couple and he was called Don.

I can't remember what she was called but they faithfully took us to Sunday school in their car. Faithfully, you know, we were not easy boys in many ways.

[32 : 43] Faithfully taking us and I can remember listening to them in the car and they would always talk in the car, you know, and it's amazing how much went in. You know, we were perhaps at times trying not to listen, you know, because we're like less than teenagers and, you know, at the time we thought they've got to be near 100 at least, you know, that they were probably like 40, like my age, you know, you know, and they used to say things way back in the car, we definitely believe, our heart is full of a strong conviction that Christ will return before we die.

Well, they've gone to glory. I don't think there's anything wrong with that type of conviction, that waiting and that hope, that's fine, but at the same time, God doesn't work to our time scale, he works to his own.

So we keep hoping because we know that it's coming and it's not wrong to think it could come today, it could come tomorrow, but it's not wrong to think either that it may not come for another thousand years.

Hope encourages us to carry on because God will keep his promise. So here's the exhortation as we close. Some of us this morning, if you're struggling with a lack of hope, there's a reason for why you are.

And that is either because you're failing to trust in the God of hope, you're failing to, in other words, you're believing, but you're not convinced. I know this is true because I've read it in the text, but I'm just not convinced by it.

[34 : 22] And that's a real common emotion for many Christians. You know, I know that Jesus Christ died on the cross, took away my sin, rose from the dead, but a girl says, you know, back in the day, what good is it if boys won't look at me?

Well, you're 12, you don't want boys to look at you yet. Just don't worry about it. But they're the type of connections that are made. You know, how does believing in that make any difference to my life? Okay? Well, in the Psalms, the psalmist, on several occasions, but in Psalm 43 in particular, he says that when your heart gets the better of you, you need to go and have a strong conversation with it.

You need to sit it down and speak sense to your own heart because your own heart is causing you to feel something different than what God has promised. Your own heart is telling you to feel a certain way that you should not feel and you need to sit it down and give it a good talking to.

And you need to tell your heart, heart, encourage yourself in God, hope in God. Psalm 43, verse 5. That's what the psalmist does. He recognizes that his mind is speaking sense, but his heart is making him feel all kind of things that are just non-sensible.

[35 : 38] And he doesn't know what he's able to do with himself. So he sits himself down and gives him a stiff talking to. Now listen, heart, be sensible. Hope in God.

Trust in him. So we've considered what hope is. We've considered how hope works. And we've seen, hopefully, the importance that you must hope in in order to hope for.

That everything that you're hoping for, that everything God promises you to hope for, you must first hope in him for those things. Because if you don't, you won't receive them.

Because all of those things are only received in Christ. They are only received in Christ. Let's not kid ourselves. They are only received in him.

So here's the final thought. Hope causes you to trust something. Worldly hope will cause you to trust things in the world.

[36 : 40] Biblical hope will cause you to trust God. Okay? Worldly hope causes you to trust something or someone in the world. Biblical hope causes you to trust God.

And it is God that we should trust. He is the one who upholds all things by the power of his word. And he is the one who guarantees that because he has, he will.

Okay? Because he has, he will. So on this first Sunday of Advent, as we look back to the first coming of Christ and as we look forward to the second coming of Christ, we hope. We hope in God for everything. So I'll leave you with a simple question. Are you sure that you're hoping in him for the things that you're hoping for? Or to put it negatively, what are you hoping in to receive what you're hoping for? And the Christian says, Jesus. Amen.