

Theme: “The Gifts of Christmas” - Hope

Text: Romans 15:4-13

4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. 5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. 8 Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, 9 and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." 10 And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" 11 And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" 12 And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This morning we come to the second gift in our Advent sermon series on “**The Gifts of Christmas:**” the gift of “**Hope.**” This gift is probably one of the most underappreciated gifts God has given us. Even in an earthly sense, we probably don’t always realize just how important **hope** is to our lives. But it is, in fact, vital to our lives as human beings. If you don’t have hope, you got nothin’! Shakespeare once wrote, “*The miserable have no other medicine But only hope.*” Thomas Fuller, an English preacher and historian of the 1600’s, wrote, “*If it were not for hopes, the heart would break.*” If you doubt the importance of **hope**, then perhaps you’ve never—or you simply can’t remember what it feels like to be hope-less. That is one of the most terrible and miserable emotional and mental states of mind a human being can be in. It’s like being at the bottom of a bottomless pit with no chance of climbing out. It is a very desperate and depressing state to be in. Well, if being hope-less is that bad mentally and emotionally, just think of how bad it would be to be *spiritually* hope-less: Free-falling down toward the “bottomless” pit of hell itself with no chance of climbing out on your own. That is truly a terrible and horrifying state to be in!

Thankfully, one of the gifts God has given us by sending His Son Jesus at Christmas was the very gift of **hope** itself! In fact, in our text God is even called “**the God of hope**” (v. 13). But this **hope** that God has gifted us with in Jesus is not like any earthly “hope,” or the “hope” we often speak of in our everyday lives. That’s more of a wish, or a possibility (as in, “I hope we have a white Christmas!” or “I hope I get everything on my wish list this Christmas!”).

No, **hope** in the Biblical sense, the **hope** that God gives us, can best be defined as

- ✠ “*joyful and confident expectation*” in God’s promises.
- ✠ **Hope** is closely linked to “faith.” It is listed with “**faith**” and “**love**” in 1 Corinthians 13 as three of the greatest gifts God has given us (“**And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.**” – 1 Corinthians 13:13).
- ✠ Hebrews 11:1 tells us that **hope** is the “groundwork” of faith: “**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**”

Our great **hope** as Christians, is of course the joyful and “*confident expectation*” that Jesus will return as He promised to take us with Him to heaven, even as He fulfilled God’s promise by His first coming as the babe born in the manger on Christmas. But how do we live in this **hope** while we still dwell here on earth, with all its difficulties and troubles that can make us feel, well, downright hope-less? How can we, as Paul prays in the last verse of our text, “**abound in hope**” (v. 13)? Well, he finishes the prayer of our last verse by saying, “**that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**” (v. 13). We tap into the “**power of the Holy Spirit**” through the Word of God. In that Word we truly find God’s gift of **hope!**

In the first verse of our text Paul points his readers, and us, to the Word of God, the Scriptures: **“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (v. 4)**. Remember, when Paul wrote these words **“the Scriptures”** consisted only of the Old Testament (the New Testament had not been written yet). Think of what the Old Testament contains: countless examples of **“patience”** and **“comfort”** that God has recorded for His people that **“we...might have hope” (v. 4)**. These things He has written down **“were written for our learning” (v. 4)**. We gain **“patience,” “comfort,”** and of course **“hope”** from these examples. Think of some of the greatest “heroes of faith” that are written about in the Old Testament. What you realize when you examine just about each one of their lives is that God instilled **“patience,” “comfort,”** and **“hope”** in them by the difficult things He allowed them to go through—some for a very long period of time. Think of men like:

- † Abraham, who waited many years for the son that God had promised him;
- † Joseph (of the Old Testament), who was hated by his brothers, sold into slavery in Egypt, and just as things were looking up, was thrown into prison for years;
- † and David, who was anointed as God’s chosen king of Israel at a very young age, even defeated the giant Goliath and won many great victories for his people, he ended up being forced into exile, hunted like an outlaw, living in caves and running for years from the envious king Saul who was trying to kill him.

To each of these men God had made great promises in which they put their **“hope.”** However, each one went through a long period of their life when it appeared as if their **hope** had died because God’s promises had failed. But the fact was, in every case, God was faithful to His promises:

- † Abraham was miraculously given his son, Isaac, when he was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90! From Isaac’s line the nation of Israel would emerge, and most importantly, from his line came Jesus, the Savior.
- † Joseph was eventually made ruler of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He was able to use his position to save many people during a great famine, including his family, and in doing so, preserved the line of Jesus, the Savior.
- † David, during those years in exile was spiritually strengthened by God and during that time wrote some of his greatest and most beautiful psalms. He was eventually crowned king at age 30, ruled for 40 years and was one of the greatest kings of Israel.

There are many other examples throughout the Old Testament as well. Think of Moses, Job, Samson, and Daniel. These things, Paul tells us, **“were written for our learning” (v. 4)**. Let’s not miss the lessons God is teaching us through them. When we are in the depths of a long and deep stretch of trials and loneliness we can look at these examples from Scripture and realize that God has not left us or forgotten us. He is going to work our difficult—and even our terrible situations—for our blessing. We can be assured that He has good reasons for allowing us to go through our tough times, just like He did with these men of the Old Testament.

Now, when Paul pointed his readers to the Old Testament Scriptures he was not just pointing his readers to the examples of these “heroes of faith.” He points them also to the One who is their true **“hope”** (and ours): Jesus Christ. Remember, he was writing to the Christian congregation in Rome that would have contained both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). And so he reminds them that Jesus came to be the Savior of all people, both Jews and Gentiles. He writes in **v. 8**, **“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers [the Jewish patriarchs, like Abraham], and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.”** He then

quotes from four different Old Testament verses that clearly prophesied that God had included the Gentiles in His plan of salvation as well (**v. 9-12**). In **v. 12** Paul quotes a prophecy about Jesus from the book of the Prophet Isaiah (a verse from our Old Testament reading this morning), "**There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope**" (**v. 12**).

This should be a very comforting thought for us too, since, as far as I know, all of us here this morning are Gentiles. These words tell us that the child born in Bethlehem's manger so many years ago is also our Christmas gift of **hope** from God the Father. Yes, even us! Even though we were born hope-less; spiritually dead in our sins and headed for condemnation. Even though we live thousands of miles from the Holy Land. Even though we are separated by a few thousand years from the days Christ came to walk this earth, still God has given this gift of **hope** in Jesus personally to each one of us by graciously bringing us to faith. We "unwrap" that gift of **hope** each time we open up His Word and read of His promises; each time "**in remembrance**" (**Luke 22:19**) of Jesus, our **Hope**, we partake of the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of our sins.

We find our **hope** in Jesus because in Him we find the fulfillment of so many of God's promises. He did come as God had promised to be the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles; the **hope**—the joyful and *confident expectation*—of all believers. He came and lived a perfect life without one misstep, one misdeed, or sin in order to be "**our righteousness**" (**Jeremiah 23:6**). He came and He "**was pierced for our transgressions**" (**Isaiah 53:5**) on the cross, and "**the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all**" (**Isaiah 53:6**). He rose again, as He said He would, three days later. Now He lives and reigns to be our comfort in sorrows; our strength in troubles; and our **hope**—our *certain expectation*—that He will work all things out for our good (**Romans 8:28**) in this life, and our *sure* and *certain hope* of heaven when He comes again. He will! He has promised. That's something you can rest your **hope** on!

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (**v. 13**). Amen.