

Hope

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[0 : 00] I would like us this morning to turn back for a short while to the chapter that we read, and in particular we can read again at verse 13 of Romans chapter 15.

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.

And as you can see from the bulletin and as I'm sure you've managed to pick up from the singing and from the reading, we are focusing today on one of the most wonderful and one of the most important topics that we could ever turn our attention to.

Today we are thinking about hope. And as we do so we are going to use Romans 15 as our guide and we're going to say four things in particular and we'll pick these up as we go along.

But first of all we can ask the question, when we talk about hope, what exactly do we mean? Well, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament the words that are used for hope convey the idea of expectation.

[1 : 27] This is brought out in verses like Isaiah 8 verse 17 where it says, I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob and I will hope in him.

Notice waiting and hoping are paired together. And that's what hope is, a sense of expectation, looking forward to something, longing for something, waiting for something and we do that all the time.

We hope for good weather, we hope for a good job, we hope that we'll be able to be together. There's this sense of expectation, hope is always looking forward and Paul brings this out in chapter 8 of Romans.

I hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Paul is saying that hope is not about what we already have or what we already see, hope is all about expectation and that makes perfect sense.

[2 : 39] I spent many, many years hoping for a wife and now that I have one, I no longer need to hope, I just need to pinch myself, but I don't need to hope anymore.

It's the same with anything else, hope is our longing and expectation for something that we need and something that we desire. But in many ways, if you think about it, hope is the opposite of being scared because when you are scared, you are waiting in the expectation of something bad.

Whatever that may be, we all know what it's like to be afraid because we are expecting something bad. Hope is the opposite because when you are hoping, you are waiting in expectation of something good.

Hope is the sense of expectation. And the first point that I want to emphasize in terms of hope is that hope is something that we all need.

This is why the topic of hope is an incredibly important topic for us to think about because it's something that we all need. It's something that we all desperately, desperately need.

[4 : 00] If you look at the world around us today, we can see so many situations of absolute desperation. You turn on the news and you look at the refugee crisis or war zones like Iraq, which we mentioned in our prayers or even in housing schemes in our own nation.

You see so many situations that seem desperate. But even in our own island, we see broken lives, we see people who are crippled by addiction, we see many, many broken hearts.

We see it everywhere and maybe you are feeling it yourself right now. Maybe you feel that sense of desperation.

Maybe you feel that sense of brokenness in your heart. Maybe you feel an emptiness in your life.

And I don't need to persuade anyone here that we all need hope. And this is where we see that hope is actually incredibly powerful.

[5 : 09] Hope is something that is incredibly powerful because if you think about it, no matter what your circumstances are, no matter where you are, hope can meet you there.

Hope can meet you wherever you are. You think about the refugees that we see on TV. If you look at these refugees, they have nothing.

They've left their homes, they've left their jobs, they've left their communities. They have nothing except for one thing.

Hope. They are making these journeys because of hope. Hope is immensely powerful.

And that means that hope is one of the most important, one of the most urgent needs of every single human being. Imagine your life. Imagine everything that's precious in your life.

[6 : 04] Imagine that you lost the hope of these things. Imagine you lost all hope of family.

Imagine you lost all hope of work. Imagine you lost all hope of a home. Imagine you lost all hope of any achievements in your life. If that was our situation, it would be unbearable.

If we had no hope of any of these things, then we would never be able to survive. And we see proof of this when even at a humanist funeral, which would be an atheistic worldview, even at that kind of context, you will hear the words being said till we meet again.

Now, that, somebody with those beliefs has no reason to expect any kind of afterlife, because they say that that doesn't exist, but yet they cannot survive without hope.

No one can live without hope. So it's one of the most important things that we could ever think about.

[7 : 33] But we have to then ask ourselves the question, why is it that we all hold on to hopes that ultimately will never last?

We all hope for things that we are guaranteed to lose. I hope that I will always stay healthy.

I hope that I'll always stay healthy, but one day I won't be. I hope that I will always have my family around me.

But one day I won't. I hope that I will be a success in my work and in everything that I do for many, many years, but one day I won't be able to work.

One day I won't be able to. I hope that I'll always have a lovely home and a nice garden and all the things that I love and one day I will leave it all behind.

[8 : 42] All of these things that I hope for, and you can add your own hopes, the things that matter to you, they are all incredibly important and we all need these hopes in our lives, but none of them can last forever.

None of them. And this, this is why the Bible is the best book in the world and this is why the Gospel is the greatest, greatest thing that you and I will ever hear because I can stand here today and with the authority of God himself, I can say to you that in Jesus Christ, you can have a hope that will last forever.

You can have a hope that will never, ever end. Indeed that is the whole reason why we have the Bible because that's what Paul tells us in this verse, in this chapter in verse four.

Look at what verse four says in chapter 15. Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction. That's referring to the Old Testament. The word of God, remember at the time when Paul wrote this letter, all they had was the Old Testament because the New Testament was in the process of being written.

Paul is saying whatever was written in former days in the Old Testament was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

[10 : 20] We have the Bible in order to give us hope. We desperately need hope. We urgently need hope and that is exactly what God wants to give you in his word.

And when you look in the New Testament, especially in the letter to the Ephesians, we find a beautiful phrase that Paul uses. Ephesians 118, having the hearts of your minds enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. And then verse four of chapter four, there is one body, one spirit, just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your caller.

You notice in the phrase it uses that we are called to a hope. You and I and the whole world around us desperately needs hope and God is calling us, calling us all to a hope that will last forever.

God is saying to you, come, come, look and see, you need hope and I can give it to you and I will give it to you. God is calling every one of us today to a hope that will last forever.

[11 : 46] We all need hope and God is willing to give it to us. So that's the first thing we all need hope.

Hope is something that we need, but we immediately then have to ask the question, if God is calling us to that hope, how do we respond and this brings us to the second thing, hope is something that we do.

Go back to Romans 15. We find these words in verse 12. Paul is quoting from Isaiah. He says, Isaiah says, the root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles in him will the Gentiles hope.

And the thing I want you to notice in this verse is that the word hope is a verb. It's something that we do.

And that's emphasized throughout the New Testament. Ephesians 1.11 is a good example. In him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope, again a verb, in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

[13 : 03] Hope is an activity that we participate in. And when we say that, we basically mean that we all have this sense of expectation, this sense of longing, this sense of anticipation.

But the fundamental point, the vital point that we have to recognize is that in order to engage in the activity of hope, this hope must have an object.

Hope is like love. You don't love in a general sense. You love something. Hope is exactly the same. We hope in specific things.

If you go to hospital, you hope in the medical staff that they will help you. As a nation, we hope in our leaders that they will govern our country well. And even we have hope in ourselves.

I hope that I'll be a good father. I hope that I'll be a good husband. Hope always has an object. And the Bible is emphasizing that when it comes to this everlasting hope to which we are being called, we are told that there is an object in whom we must hope.

[14 : 21] And again and again, the Bible uses the phrase hope in. The Bible does not tell us to hope in a vague sense.

The Bible tells us to hope in God. Two examples are on the screen. 1 Peter, who through him are believers in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

Notice the language. Hope has an object in God. First Timothy 4 is exactly the same. For to this end, we turn and snipe because we have our hope set on the living God.

Hope always has an object. This is incredibly important because a lot of people have hopes for eternity.

A lot of people have hopes that everything will work out well. A lot of people have hopes that we will meet again.

[15 : 30] A lot of people have hopes for eternity, but not everyone has hope in God for eternity.

And that is what we need. In order for us to have hope, it must have an object. We must set our personal hope and trust in God.

Notice just briefly that these verses make a connection between hoping and believing. And that is exactly what we must do. We set our hope in God by trusting in him, by putting our faith in him.

And that is the whole reason we can hope because of who God is and because of what God has done. That is what the whole of the message of the Bible is. Christianity is not about us, about who we are or what we have done.

It is about who God is and about what he has done through his Son. That is the emphasis of the Bible. God has sent his Son into the world as one of us.

[16 : 35] God as the Son has taken the punishment for our sins on the cross. God has conquered death by raising his Son from the dead. God has offered salvation as a free gift to everyone and God has opened a way for us to come into his family.

And so it is because of everything that he is and everything that he has done that you and I can hope.

That is why Paul says that our hope is Jesus Christ. 1 Timothy 1.1 he speaks about our God, God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.

We do not have a sort of vague optimistic hazy flow of hope. We have a concrete certain real hope. We hope in something rather we hope in someone.

We hope in Jesus Christ. He is the source of our hope. He is the substance of our hope. He is the whole reason that we can have hope.

[17 : 43] It is the reality of the person and the work of Christ that means we can have hope.

Now this means that the vital question for you and for me is not do you hope? Because we all hope.

The vital question is where do you hope? Where do you hope?

Because our hope must be in Jesus Christ and you can pray to him. You can bow your head and close your eyes even right now and set your hope in him.

Hope is something that we need. Hope is something that we do. Thirdly, hope is something that we can now have.

[18 : 52] When we set our hope in Jesus Christ we now have hope. This is what Paul emphasises in verse 13 of this chapter.

Make the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

If God is the object of our hope then the result is that we now have hope. Remember we said at the very start. Hope is what we all desperately need and by hoping and trusting in God you can have it and I can have it.

We now have hope. And the New Testament gives us details of what it is that we have in terms of our hope. Remember a few months ago we said that the New Testament uses the phrase hope in emphasising that there's an object to our hope.

The New Testament also uses the phrase hope of revealing to us what we have through our hope.

[19 : 58] There's four examples here. Look at the phrase hope of. First of Thessalonians 5.8, but since we belong to the day let us be sober having put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Relations 5.5 for through the spirit by faith we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. Colossians 1.27 to them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory.

And Titus 3.7 so being by justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. These are revealing four things to us.

When you set your hope in Jesus Christ you have a hope of salvation, a hope of righteousness, a hope of glory and a hope of eternal life. Now let's just think about these four things a little bit more together.

In Christ we have a hope of salvation. Now the word salvation basically means to be rescued. You think of a sinking ship, you think of the helicopter coming to rescue people and desperate need.

[21 : 12] That is what Christ is doing for us. We are all in mortal danger because of our sin. But because of Christ we have a rescuer.

We have salvation. That means that if we trust in him we are safe. We are totally safe.

Now you think of everything that can threaten you. You think of the power of sin. You only have to look at the world and you see the hostility that is in our world where people treat each other so badly.

You think of the power that sin has in so many ways. You think of the effect of sin in my life and in your life where we now live in a cursed world where we face the threat of disease and of suffering and of hardship and of sorrow and the effect of sin that permeates everything.

You think of all the ways in which we are threatened by the power of sin, by the effect of sin and perhaps most of all by the father of sin himself, the devil who would love nothing more than to see every one of us fall.

[22 : 26] That's our situation. A situation of desperate need and yet in the face of all of this because of Jesus Christ you if you trust in him are completely and totally safe.

You are completely and totally safe because in Jesus you have the hope of salvation.

Think of everything that makes you feel threatened, everything that makes you feel uncomfortable. In Jesus we have total safety.

So we have the hope of salvation. We also have the hope of righteousness. Now what does this mean? When it says hope of righteousness what does that mean? Well let me ask a question.

How often do you look at the world and see so much that is wrong? How often do you look at the news or look at the world and you see you see suffering that we know is wrong?

[23 : 33] Again we've mentioned the refugees that's such a clear example of suffering that seems so unfair. We see people behaving in a way that is wrong.

We see corruption in all sorts of areas whether it's sport or banking or whatever it may be. We see people's behaviour that is totally wrong. We see attitudes that are wrong where people groups and communities will hate each other simply because they are different.

We see people using money in all sorts of ways that is inappropriate and wrong. You and I look at the world and we see so much that is wrong.

And all of that can leave us thinking where do we turn? Where can we go? And the answer is that in God we find one who will put everything right.

That's what we mean when we say a hope of righteousness. A hope that God will put everything right. A hope that one day there will be a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

[24 : 49] That means a new earth where there will be an end to corruption, a new earth where there will be a ban on exploitation, a new earth where there will be a disappearance of all immorality and where suffering will never ever ever be experienced again.

In heaven there will be a lot of things that we can't do. And thank God for that because in heaven we will no longer be able to abuse each other, to exploit each other, to be corrupt, to be selfish, to be hurting other people for our own gain.

Everything that you see that is wrong in this world and that grieves your heart will be gone because God is giving us a hope of righteousness.

A hope where everything that is wrong will be put right. That's the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Colossians tells us that we have a hope of glory. Now this is worth thinking about as much as we can because this is remarkable. Glory is a characteristic of God.

[26 : 07] Not of us but of God. When you think of God you think of glory. And this is telling us that not only do we have a hope of rescue, not only do we have a hope of everything being put right, we also in Jesus Christ have the hope of being so so close to God that we will share even in His glory.

You will share in His glory. That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3 18, and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

God is making us like Himself conforming us to His glorious nature. God does not just want us to be safe, God does not just want us to be righteous, God wants you and me as His family.

And as His family, God wants us to share in the family traits of God's own family.

We often see resemblances in families. Sometimes you can see it very, very strongly. My sister-in-law is pregnant and she's due in about three weeks time or so.

[27 : 41] And those of you who know my sister-in-law will know that there are strong genes in that family in terms of how they look. And she had a scan a couple of weeks ago and you can tell that it's Ian the lawyer's grandson.

Her family traits are strong. For the family trait of God's household is glory and God wants us to share in that.

And that means that we can look forward to an incredible closeness with God. We can look forward to a knowledge that He loves us with an unmeasurable love.

We can look forward to being His treasured possession forevermore. The promise of the Gospel is at the highest level because it is a hope of glory.

And that means that when you get to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ, you will not just be a number, you will not just slot in unnoticed, you will not be way down somewhere near the bottom of God's list of priorities, you will be brought into that precious number which shares in the very glory of God Himself.

[29 : 05] Now, you think of a wedding. You think when somebody gets married. It's a glorious occasion. There's something glorious and wonderful about a wedding.

And in particular, there is a glory in the bride and groom. They stand at the front and everybody focuses on them. Everyone's attention is on them because they are glorious.

They are the focal point. Everybody gazes at the bride and groom with wonder. Now that's a picture of what heaven is going to be like.

But the astonishing truth of the Bible is that if you trust in Jesus, when you get to heaven, you will not be a guest.

You will be the bride. You will be the bride. That's how special God's people are.

[30 : 15] And that's what it means when it says we have a hope of glory. And that's why Jesus said in John 17, the hope that you have given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one.

You will not be an afterthought in heaven. You will not be in the background in heaven. You will not be simply a guest. You will be the bride of the lamb.

And all of these hopes are wonderful. The hope of salvation is amazing. The hope of righteousness is wonderful. We crave righteousness in a sinful world.

The hope of glory is at a level that is beyond anything that our minds can understand. But perhaps the most amazing thing of all is that these things will last forever and ever and ever because Titus 3 is reminding us that in Jesus Christ we have the hope of eternal life.

We have the hope of eternal life. Now let your mind drift into the endless days of eternity.

[31 : 26] Think about eternal life, life that will never end. Now I don't know about you but I often find myself thinking how many more times will I have this?

You think of relatives who live far away. You meet up with them maybe in the summer and you think how many more times will we be together? You think of sports that you enjoy.

You think how many more times will I be able to do this? And I suppose on a very personal note at home Annie comes running up to me and jumps into my arms and I pick her up and I hold her and so often I find myself thinking how many more times will I get to do this?

And in this world we are on a countdown because as we said at the very start so many of the precious things that we hold on to will not last forever and we ourselves will not last forever.

We are on a countdown in this world but there are no countdowns in heaven.

[32 : 49] That's what eternal life means. Life that shall never end. And that's the most amazing thing for us to think about and that's what God wants you and me to have.

And so in Jesus if we trust in Jesus, if you trust in Jesus you can have hope, hope of salvation, hope of righteousness, hope of glory, hope of eternal life and you've got to want that.

You've got to want that. And it's these things that enable us to endure. This is why Christians have such comfort in life as they go through the challenges that this world brings because through this hope we can endure.

Paul tells us that in Romans 5 not only that we rejoice in their sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Suffering will come but with the hope that comes through Jesus Christ we can endure. If you hope in Jesus Christ then no matter what the world brings you have hope.

[34 : 20] Remember what we said at the start, hope is powerful. Hope can make you wherever you are and the hope that comes through the Gospel is the most powerful hope of all because if you get a devastating diagnosis it cannot take away your hope.

If you suffer a heartbreaking loss it cannot take away your hope. If you are betrayed or abused or shunned or let down by your fellow human being it cannot take away your hope and if you feel weak and frail and like a total failure it cannot take away your hope.

Hope is incredibly powerful and as you and I face the shadow of death which we all do in Jesus Christ we can have a hope that is stronger than death itself.

Hope, death will wreck every hope that we have except this one because Christ is stronger than death.

Death can and will break every organ and cell in your body and in my body but it will never break your hope if your trust is in Jesus Christ.

[35 : 56] Jesus gives us an amazing hope. Hope is something you and I need desperately. Hope is something that we must do and we must set our hope on God.

As a result hope is something that we have and how precious is that hope but fourthly and very very quickly hope is something that we share.

Hope is something that we share and again Romans 15 hints at that because Paul says in that fascinating passage at the end in verse 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.

Paul is saying that he hopes to see these Christians because he shares a bond with them. Now the letter to the Romans is an amazing letter because it is full of some of the most rich and wonderful teaching that we find ever written.

The book of Romans is an utterly amazing book and Paul takes all this incredible information and he presents it to this group of people who seem so special to him, so close to him, so dear to him and do you know what is absolutely amazing?

[37 : 12] He has never met them. Paul has never met the Romans. He has never set eyes on them and yet he shares something incredible with them and the New Testament makes it incredibly clear and wonderfully clear that our hope is something that we share with every other believer.

That brings us back to the verse we read at the very start of our service that we are waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Notice what it says, our hope and many many other passages speak the same way as God's people, we share this hope.

That means that as I look forward to spending eternity in heaven, I look forward to sharing it all with you if your trust is in Jesus.

As Christians we are hoping together, we are anticipating together, we are looking forward to the fact that we will be together forever and ever and ever and ever.

[38 : 31] My hope is your hope, your hope is my hope, it is a shared collective hope. It should bind us all more closely together because we have an eternal hope and I thank God for every believer in here who is part of that.

Your hope of the gospel is a shared hope and that means, and this is maybe the most important thing that I'm going to say, if you are not yet a Christian, you can share in it too.

You can share in this hope as well. You need it, you can have it.

All you have to do is put your hope in Jesus. Tell him that you want to be saved, that your hope is nowhere else, that you are hoping in him.

This is the wonderful thing about hoping in something. You're not hoping in yourself, you're not going to God and saying, I hope Lord that I'm good enough. That's not what you have to say. You just say to God, I hope in you because he has done everything.

[40 : 11] The hope of the gospel is the most wonderful thing that we can think about. You can share in that too.

You can. You can right now and I hope with all of my heart that you will.

Amen. Let us pray.