

Romans 15:4, 13 **⁴For 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. ¹³May 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.**

When we think of hope, we usually think of something to look forward too.

If you think about the things people often hope for, most often they are material things. How would you define hope? If someone asks you to explain what the word hope means, what would you say? It's one of those words that can be difficult to get a grip on.

Is hope something you hope when you want to get a good grade in school, or just getting through the workday, or hoping to get a refund on your tax return.

Maybe the best way to think about what hope means is this: Hope is looking forward to a gift from God. We certainly give thanks to all the gifts that God gives us. The way God uses hope doesn't revolve around material or tangible means.

In his commentary on Romans, Luther says this: "Hope is not a material thing." If that isn't a countercultural statement today, I don't know what is! Hope is not a material thing, and yet most everything that we hope for is or revolves around material and tangible stuff.

God wants us to think higher than the material things that we put so much of our attention in to. During the last few weeks of the church year and the first few weeks of the new church year, our readings revolve around a theme of a new heaven and a new earth. The things of this world will pass away.

If you devote yourselves to and cling to material things—you will be disappointed eternally. Heaven and earth will pass away; thus, sayest the Lord. Our homes our wardrobes, our cars, all of our stuff will pass away.

When people are sick and dying, the last thing they want or hope for is more stuff. So why do they wait until the end of their life until they get their priorities straight?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, things we put our hope in are fleeting, it's tangible—moth and rust will destroy it. Hope is looking forward to a gift from God. Any hope based on what we do, is no hope at all. What is it that you hope for?

Well, if hope is looking forward to a gift from God; *well then God—why don't you give me the winning lottery ticket? God, why don't you give me a new car?* Etc.

It's important to acknowledge God as the giver of all good things, but often our hearts and minds and hopes teach us, what or who are idols are.

Hope is not a material thing! Luther also says in his commentary on Romans: “What the Christian needs to do is to die to all material things.” That doesn't mean we have to sell everything we have and move off to a convent or a monastery.

God is the giver of all good gifts, He knows what you need in regard to caring for your body and caring for your family, and caring for the community. God knows this and he gives it to you in full measure.

And yet at the same time, don't let these gifts (these things) be the object of your hope. Don't let these things turn into your god.

So, what do we do? First, we need to realize this misplaced hope, or being so down and out when circumstances are bad that we lose hope, we need to realize that this is a universal condition.

God's Law tells us the reality of our sinful nature. **Romans 3:22-23**: “For there is no distinction: or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Matthew 3:2-3 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

There is no difference; for all of us at times hope in the wrong thing, and become hopeless when things go bad. Jesus says in **Luke 21:34** “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”

How many times aren't we tempted by looking around at circumstances individually, or in the family, or in the community, in our congregation, etc. and to say there is no hope.

Jesus is our only hope. This is one more trick Satan is using to take you out of the loving arms of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. How do we get this hope when we feel hopeless? How do we channel our hope back to God?

God is the giver of all good gifts, and especially hope. Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit teaches us in verse 4 of the sermon text: **“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.”**

It's through God's Word that we are built up with endurance when the difficult times come. It's through God's Word that we have patience when the situation seems hopeless.

It is through God's Word that we are pointed away from our false idols and given the strength to put them to death; to come forth new creations, ready to cling to the hope that God gives us.

So often when people are hopeless, they cut themselves off from God's House, and God's Word; from the encouragement from brothers and sisters in Christ.

Where Jesus is, there is hope. Where Jesus is, there is heaven, where Jesus meets his people in his loving, encouraging Word.

Who else can you count on when things are the darkest? Who else can you count on when things are the bleakest? There is only one who will never let us down—who will never leave us or forsake us.

The one who took our false hopes, and false idols and died with them on the Cross. There is only one who overcame death and the grave For You! The Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is here with you through the encouragement and strengthening of the Word. He is here with us forgiving, feeding, growing, giving life, and giving hope.

What are you hoping for this Christmas season? Lots of gifts under the tree? A warm Christmas vacation destination? What are you hoping for? A little peace in the family?

There is one hope that is a certain hope, because it rests certain and secure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—For You! This is hope, and it's God's gift to you.

Thanks be to God; you are clothed in Christ righteousness which covers all your sins.

You were once dead, but you are now alive in Christ Jesus. Die daily, as you daily return to your baptism and through the Holy Spirit God will bring forth a new creation.

Then what belongs to the new man come will forth. But what is the old man? It's what is born in human beings from Adam: anger, hate, envy, unchastity, stinginess, laziness, arrogance, even unbelief. The old man is infected with all vices and has by nature nothing good in him.

Now, when we have come into Christ's kingdom, these things must daily decrease. The longer we live in the Holy Spirit the more we become like the fruits of the spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, this hope that comes from God, no matter what the circumstances are, God in Christ Jesus will give you good gifts. When you are filled with this hope, then you are filled with joy! **Joy to the world, the Lord has come!**

Most importantly, remember what real hope is: Looking forward to a gift from God. The greatest gift of all is already yours! Forgiveness, life, salvation in Jesus. For You!

May Advent hope abound among you today, and always. Amen