

God's Hope Fills You! **Romans 15:4-13**

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin tells the people to make straight paths for the Lord. Can you imagine a preacher calling the people who come to listen to him a brood of vipers? That probably wouldn't go over very well today. People don't like to hear they are sinners. Most do not want to be told they need to stop sinning and repent.

In John's 1st Epistle, we learn, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.* (1 John 1:8-10) Paul, the great apostle also struggles with sin. He comments that he desires to do what is right, yet finds himself doing the very things he desires not to do - in other words, he find himself sinning. Why? Because of the sinful flesh in which he, and all people live their lives until this life is ended.

So, God's message in the Old Testament is to repent. God's message in the New Testament is to repent. Both Old & New Testaments have another common theme, a theme of hope. They both point to the purpose of repentance, salvation in the Messiah, salvation in the Christ of God.

Repentance is the message that God gave to John to bring to the people. It is the same message Jesus brought, and the same message Jesus commanded His disciples to preach. Just before His ascension, this is what happened. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, **“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are my witnesses of these things.** (Luke 24:45-48)

The purpose for repentance, is so that forgiveness may be preached in the name of Jesus Christ. That is the Gospel! The Gospel is that you and I have hope because of what Christ did. You and I are in the same boat with all the people on earth, for all people are poor, miserable sinners. All people are in need of forgiveness.

The season of Advent is a season of hope and preparation for the coming of the Son of God. What is there to hope in, if you do not understand your sinfulness? The birth of a baby? Oh, yippee!! There are thousands of babies born every day. Why do we take the special time to prepare for this One's birth? Because we are not only preparing to celebrate His birthday, but we are gathering in hopeful anticipation and preparation for His second advent. It is His first advent that prepares us for His coming again.

The hope of Advent is the hope of what is to be yours because Christ came once, comes to you still, and will come again. He came once to redeem you. He was born of a virgin and took on human flesh for a purpose, to live a life untainted by sin. God's own Son was incarnate to suffer what you and I and all mankind deserve because we have sinned.

Paul talks about unity. You and I are to welcome one another. That is not always done. You think you are better than so-and-so because you know they are a worse sinner than you. You are ashamed around someone else because they know your secret sin and it is a bit embarrassing.

Before God, you are all the same. You are sinners. And God doesn't make judgements about the degree of sin. All sins earn us death. So then, as Paul says in our text, we can welcome one another. You are all in the same boat with me, sinners in need of forgiveness.

Thank goodness for the statement in our text, "you are to welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you." His life was given as the ransom for your sins. The hope of Advent is the hope which comes from Christ's welcoming of you. He welcomed you into Himself when He purchased you with His very lifeblood upon the cross. He welcomes you by removing all your sins and giving you His perfect righteousness.

What is more, is that you they are to welcome one another, just as Christ welcomed you, in order to bring praise to God. As Christ died for your sins, without exception, every last one of them, so too His death was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people. All those who the Holy Spirit moves to repent of their sins and cling to that sacrifice, all are one in Christ. You and I are to welcome them as they are, perfect, redeemed, holy children of the heavenly Father - brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ gave Himself as the ransom for your sins. In baptism, He made you one with Him and bestowed upon you the Holy Spirit. He continues to come to you as He speak His forgiveness into your ear and feeds it to you the sacred meal of His body and blood. These things fill you with hope because they feed and nourish your faith.

Who are you? A redeemed child of God! What does that mean? I have home in Christ's eternal kingdom! Advent is about both events - preparing to celebrate the birth of Him who bought your redemption - and preparing for His return, the hope of your redemption.

Dear friends in Christ, God's hope fills you. Our text says it this way, "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."

You came in those doors today to hear about the hope of being a Christian. You came in the hope of receiving forgiveness. Your sins are forgiven. You came in the hope of having your faith strengthened. The Holy Spirit works on the hearts of those who hear the Word of Christ.

That hope which springs within your heart is the work of God's Spirit, God works faith in your heart, it is God's hope which fills you. It is your hope to see your Savior in heaven. And this hope is not a wishy-washy, "I hope so," but a confident hope which says, "Yes that is my hope, my confidence."

Job expressed this same Old Testament hope when he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart

yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27) There is confident hope, a yearning to see what he knows is his, but which he must wait to obtain.

You see that kind of hope in the eyes of children during this season for an entirely different reason. They will sit and look at the Christmas tree - first, they will daydream about what will be under it, but they are not sure. Soon, presents will appear. There is that one unmistakable box, the right size, the right shape, the right weight, the right sound when it is shaken. And it is only then that hope rises in the heart. This is the hope which says, “I know what is mine - I know what that present contains.”

You dearly beloved of Christ have that hope as well, for God’s hope fills you. You can say, “I know what is mine.” An eternal place in heaven where I will sit by my Savior’s side and behold Him face to face.

God’s hope fills you as you gather here and in this place God has wrapped presents for you to receive. The voice of the undershepherd, commanded by Christ to speak, is the wrapping which covers Christ’s coming to you with the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit comes in the preached Word to build faith. And a veil covers presents which are placed upon the altar, unwrapping them, God gives you Christ’s body and blood, forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation.

You do not *wish* to receive wonderful things from God, you come here with a *confident hope*, you *know* God will do great things to you. And these gifts fill you up with God’s hope. It is indeed a wonderful circle - you come because of God’s hope within you and here He strengthens that hope.

The hope of Old Testament believers was to see God’s salvation. Christ came, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger - He fulfilled that hope when He gave salvation as the gift of His life and death. The hopes of all were fulfilled in Christ. God’s hope fills you as you prepare to celebrate God’s gift in that birth.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the believers you can read about in the Old Testament shared the hope that they would live eternally with their God - as Job said, that they would see their Redeemer face to face. They have had that hope fulfilled. You share that hope with them, that you will attain, at the last, a place in God’s heavenly kingdom with your Redeemer.

Today, you have had that hope renewed, for it is the Holy Spirit’s job to fill you with that hope. And He has done so in this place. And so you will leave here today, and God’s hope fills you. Amen.