

Hope – The First Sunday in Advent

It is difficult to live without hope. To live without hope is literally to live in despair – that's the meaning of the word 'despair'.

My text from this morning comes from the second of our Bible readings. In Romans 15 verse 4, the apostle Paul writes, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."

Jeremiah 33:14-16

But let's look first at the passage that was read from Jeremiah.

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

“In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:
The LORD Our Righteous Saviour.”

On the whole, the Prophecy of Jeremiah is quite a gloomy book. Recently we had two weeks of daily Bible readings from Jeremiah. The passages were all about God's judgment upon faithless Israel, Judah and Jerusalem. They warned that God was going to send the Babylonians to crush them and to take them off into exile – there was no place to escape. After two weeks of such readings, my wife and I were beginning to feel rather depressed ourselves.

But every now and again in the Book of Jeremiah the clouds part and a ray of glorious light shines through. The passage we read is one of those rays of sunshine.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 is set against the gloomy background of the judgment currently being experienced by God's people. "The days are coming", says the Lord, "when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah."

The days are coming when God will act towards his people in salvation rather than judgment. Look in hope towards that day. God will raise up a new king for his people; a descendant of David but very different from all those who they have known. He will be a righteous king.

Many of the problems the people had experienced had resulted from the unfaithfulness of their kings, leading the people astray and bringing God's judgment. God will send them a righteous king under whose rule they will be rescued and live in safety. Who is this king? He will be called, "The LORD Our Righteous Saviour."

In these verses we have a promise of the coming of the Messiah, the Lord's anointed King. He will, in some mysterious way, also be the Lord himself, come to save his people. He will come to provide them with a righteousness that they could never create for themselves. He will be "The Lord our Righteousness."

"The days are coming", says the Lord. In the midst of present judgment and loss wait in hope for the day that is coming. God's promise provides ground for the hope of a people facing despair.

Romans 15:4-13

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name.'

Again, it says,

'Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.'

And again,

'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him.'

And again, Isaiah says,

'The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope.'

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

Let me take you back to Romans 15:4: "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."

We know that God kept his promises spoken through Jeremiah. Christ has come and has provided salvation for all who trust in him; he is "The Lord our Righteousness". Indeed, he is our wisdom, our righteousness and our redemption. But when Paul writes to these Christians in Rome, Jewish and Gentile Christians, they were facing the possibility of persecution from the unstable Emperor, Nero. They were longing for King Jesus to return; for him to come again and establish his kingdom in all its fulness.

Paul says to them, look back at the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Remember that time when his people of old were waiting for God to come and save them: "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." Think about those Scriptures. They were written to encourage *you* and give *you* patience and hope as you wait for Christ's coming.

So for Ourselves ...

And so this Scripture, Romans 15:4, is for us also this morning. It speaks to us of the hope we have in Christ and of the patience and encouragement we need as we look forward to his coming.

Let me summarise how these Scriptures apply to us in three points:

1. Hope is rooted in the promises of God in his word

Christian hope is very different from the hopes we have in our everyday life. We hope that the day will be fine as we are planning to hang out the washing or go out somewhere. We hope for a clear day but we know that our hopes may not be fulfilled.

Christian hope is sure and certain because it rests in the things that God has promised in his word. We know that God does not fail. God is always faithful to his promises.

But you may have to wait for the promise to be fulfilled. It was about 600 years between the promise God made through Jeremiah – the promise we read in Jeremiah 33 – and the coming of Jesus Christ, the righteous King.

Paul speaks about "the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." The Scriptures give us endurance *and* encouragement; endurance to wait patiently in the encouragement that the day will come. This is hope. Our hope that Christ will come again to establish his kingdom of righteousness and peace is rooted in the promises of God in his word.

2. Hope is grounded in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord *has* come:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;

God keeps his promises. And in Jesus he has demonstrated the greatness and wonder of his love towards us, not only in sending his Beloved Son into this world but in giving him up to a cruel death upon the cross for our salvation.

And Christ, through his death and resurrection, *has* conquered the powers of sin and of death:

Christ has died;
Christ is risen;
Christ will come again

Christ's victory is the ground of our hope. God's kingdom shall come and his will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Christ – this victorious Christ – in us is our hope of glory. We who trust in him shall share in his triumph.

3. Hope fills us with joy and peace in believing

At the end of the passage from Romans we read this morning Paul writes, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Even when we face trials and disappointments, even when we face days of pain and the shadow of death, the hope we have in God's promises in Christ can fill us with joy and peace through faith in him.

We have a sure and certain hope that "the time is coming", the day is coming when we shall share in his glory.

This our hope as individuals: our sure and certain hope that even in the face of death we have his promise that we shall be with him in glory.

This is our hope for our world in all its confusion, brokenness, self-seeking, evil and conflict. We have a sure and certain hope that the day will come when Jesus shall return to make all things new. There will be no more tears, no more sighing, no more pain, no more death. There will be a renewed creation, the home of righteousness and peace.

In Conclusion

Hope is rooted in the promises of God in his word, grounded in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, experienced as these truths are impressed on our hearts by God's Holy Spirit.

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

Peter Misselbrook

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