

Romans 15:4 NKJV

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.

In our context, this sentence could easily be placed in parenthesis as a side thought. Paul was explaining how Christ was an example of someone who did not please Himself. And then Paul quotes a part of a Psalm 69:9. It was a prophetic reference to Christ, while at the same time a direct quote from David about something David was experiencing.

Then it seems to me what Paul says next in our text this morning is essentially saying, I can use this verse this way because of the way scripture was written. Even some of the things David said about **himself** were not intended for just that purpose. The mass of scripture, and Paul is clearly referring to Old Testament scripture, was written **for more** than just the people living at the time it was written. And it was written for more than just a **history** lesson.

It was written **for us**, with us in mind, as well as every future and past generation of believers. And it was written that we might learn something. And the **result** of what we would learn would be that we would have hope.

So, to start applying this passage, let's start by looking at our own lives. Do we have hope?

Hope is earnest expectation.

Hope is wildly looking forward to what we know is going to happen.

One of the things this study in Romans has been teaching me is **the necessity of hope** in order to live a victorious Christian life. It is **hope** that helps us avoid seeing ourselves as victims of God.

What I mean by that is that there are costs to living the Christian life. There are painful situations that we are not free to avoid that our non believing associates can avoid to their hearts content. We are not free to covet. We are not free to commit sexual immorality in any of its forms. (We can practice it in the way God prescribes it, but no other.) We cannot take vengeance. We cannot make our own rules for marriage, nor for when we will **give up** on that relationship. Christ promises that **we will face suffering** at the hands of those who hate Him. He promises costs to believers from friends and family due to following Christ.

With all that being true, doesn't it seem like being a Christian is being a victim? Doesn't it seem like we are accepting unnecessary suffering? How can we cease to see ourselves as God's victims? How do we come to the conclusion that we are the blessed ones? How do we fuel our minds so we don't fall into this terrible

mental trap? How do we reconcile the idea that God is good with our current suffering?

The answer- HOPE.

Hope is what makes our decision to follow Christ the most logical of all decisions.

Hope is what brings the proper perspective to our current suffering.

Hope is what allows us to see ourselves as the blessed ones, even when those who seem to have **the lion's share of what this world offers** are doing us harm.

And it is not **wishful** thinking. It is **logical** thinking. It is **true** thinking.

The faithful Christian life cannot be lived without hope any more than our cars can make a trip without a motor. Even if we try to live such a life, we will be downtrodden and depressed. We will view ourselves as deeply unfortunate. We will view God as the source of our dismal state. We cannot have joy in such a state unless we are delusional. Paul himself said as much when he said

1 Corinthians 15:19 (NKJV)

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

He was talking about Resurrection and he was making the point that if we don't resurrect with Christ, it isn't worth it. If the only hope we have is limited to this life, we are to be pitied. We have nothing that is worth having.

There are people who glibly say that even if Christ was not real, they would still live the Christian life for all the advantages it has given them. They point to their happy families and their pleasant dispositions and their comfortable lifestyles. But the one thing you can be sure of. These people have not truly suffered for the name of Christ. You won't find Christians in Syria saying that. You won't find Christians in Iran or North Korea saying that. No, if you asked those people they would tell you that they are grateful for what Christ provides them **in this life** and they are **wildly looking forward** to what He has prepared for them in the next.

This life is not quite so addictive **to them** as it is to most of us.

Suffering puts hope in perspective. Suffering shows the proper importance of hope.

Hope, by its very definition, has a future element to it. Hope is not about today. It is about tomorrow. And hope will have an end to it. Hope will be fulfilled. Paul said **1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)**

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Faith is trusting when not seeing. That will end. Hope is looking forward to a good reward. That will end. But love, that will endure.

You may have wondered why someone in your family received a book on CD about Heaven this Christmas. I did this because of what I was learning about hope. And how can you have **hope** if you have **no idea** what it **is** you are looking forward to. It would be like Mark telling Eli he is getting him an Oscilloscope for Christmas. Eli would likely be thinking, that's fine Dad, but how about a toy instead? He would have no idea what an Oscilloscope is so he would have no way of looking forward to it.

That is similar to my ideas about heaven. I get that I will have an eternal reward. And I do **trust** that it will be very good. And I can take God's word for that. But I have never done the work to see what He really says about it. Or what the passages imply that tell us about heaven.

Well Randy Alcorn did. You don't have to agree with him about everything. I don't. But he points your mind in a direction that is worth looking.

If hope is the engine in the car illustration I used earlier, what is the fuel?

Let's look at our text again.

Romans 15:4 NKJV

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.

The fuel for our hope is learning those things that were written before. In other words, it is **scripture** that fuels our **hope**. Now keep in mind that when Paul refers to scripture in his epistles, his audience would have immediately thought of the Old Testament. I don't know how much they knew in Paul's day that the very writings they were reading would become referred to as scriptures by later generations. They probably didn't.

Now Paul tells us in verse 4 that scripture was written for our learning. They were written with purpose. They were intended as a benefit for us. They were provided for us.

Let's look more at what scripture is for, what is its intended use and effect?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So we see that scripture's source is God. We have got to have that nailed down before we can have hope. If we don't believe that scripture holds behind it the **authority of God**, we are just left with literature and wishful thinking. But if it

truly is inspired by God, if they are, as it were, the words of God, then we have a basis for hope. We have a foundation.

Then we are told that they are given for this purpose- **completion**. And that is defined as having everything we need for every good work.

Do you ever feel incomplete, like you are not ready for life? Well, this passage tells us where to go. To the scriptures.

So we see the source and intent of scriptures in this verse. So let's look at another.

2 Peter 1:19-21 (NKJV)

19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,

21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Again we are told about the source of scripture. It uses a word that describes inspiration in sailing terms. It is as if the writers were a sail and the Holy Spirit filled their sails with wind and drove them where He wanted them to go.

So scripture is what God wants to say and it only means what He intended it to mean. We can see again that we can trust it. We can trust its source. We can trust its truth. We can trust its authority. But we must read it the way it was intended to be read.

The next passage tells us more.

1 Corinthians 10:5-6 (NKJV)

5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV)

11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Here again Paul emphasizes that God had scriptures written for **US**. They are written for us to learn from. You don't need a PHD in the Bible to understand good examples and bad examples. You don't need a seminary to teach you that disobeying God does not end well and obeying Him does.

My favorite Bible application tool is a simple list of 7 questions. You ask these questions of everything you read... in context.

1. Is there any example for me to follow?
2. Is there any command for me to obey?
3. Is there any error for me to avoid?
4. Is there any sin for me to forsake?
5. Is there any promise for me to claim?
6. Is there any new thing about God Himself?
7. What will I do or focus on today because of what God has said?

You see, anyone can do that. It isn't that complicated to understand the Bible enough to obey it. God wrote it for our benefit. So it only stands to reason that it is not that hard to get a great benefit **from** it.

Now let's move from scripture's **authority** and scriptures **intent** to how scripture relates to hope.

One of the things you will find is that we are to **hope in the Lord**. And we are also to hope in **what scripture tells us is true**. And that isn't a big surprise. Really, how could you separate the two? If scriptures are inspired by God, what is written is an extension of **who wrote it**.

Jeremiah tells us **WHO** our hope is.

Jeremiah 14:8 (NKJV)

8 O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble,

Jeremiah names Christ- Hope of Israel. He doesn't just **give** hope. He **IS** their hope. **Hope** is His name. He embodies everything worth hoping in.

Then he says this:

Jeremiah 17:7 (NKJV)

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.

Notice the relationship between trust and hope. It is like we said earlier, the thing that makes us the blessed ones is our belief in the character of God and the conviction that He will grant everything that He promises.

Now let's look at some of the things David said. I really like David because he didn't use spin. In the 60's vernacular, "He told it like it is." He talked about the great distress his soul felt, and the next sentence out of his mouth would be what he expected in the future, what his hope was. And we see how that hope carried him through the toughest situations.

Psalms 42:5 (NKJV)

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.

I really like this passage. David is confronting his own feelings. He is counselling himself in the midst of what looks like a depression.

Spurgeon says this:

“As though he were two men, the psalmist talks to himself. His faith reasons with his fears, his hope argues with his sorrows. These present troubles, are they to last forever? The rejoicing of my foes, are they more than empty talk? My absence from the solemn feasts, is that a perpetual exile? Why this deep depression, this faithless fainting, this chicken hearted melancholy? As Trapp says, “David chideth David out of the dumps.” And herein he is an example for all the desponding ones”

He goes on-

“Hope thou in God- If every evil be let loose from Pandora’s box, yet is there hope at the bottom. This is the grace that swims, though the waves roar and be troubled. God is unchangeable, and therefore his grace is the ground for unshaken hope. If everything be dark, yet the day will come, and meanwhile hope carries stars in her eyes; her lamps are not dependent upon oil from without, her light is fed by secret visitations of God which sustain the spirit. For I shall yet praise Him- Yet will my sighs give place to songs, my mournful ditties shall be exchanged for triumphal paeans. A loss of the **sense** of God’s love is not a loss of **that love** itself; the jewel is there though it gleams not on our breast; hope **knows** her title good when she **cannot** read it clear; she expects the promised boon though at present providence stands before her with empty hands”

Isn’t that a truth to bask in this morning. Our hope is a true hope, no matter how we might feel at the present.

David is talking to himself the way Christians are told to. He is reorienting to a reality that cannot be seen. And what is the thing he mentions to bring his thinking around?

Hope! And not just the idea of hope. It is hope placed in the firm reality of God. David reminds himself in His misery that this misery will not last forever. David tells himself that times are coming when I will praise God for the healing that will happen to Him when David is aware of God’s approval of him. And while that may happen in this life.... And for David it did. We can know for certain that it will happen in eternity. When we hear, “well done my good and faithful servant”, we will surely praise God for the help of His countenance.

Psalm 62:5 (NKJV)

5 My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him.

Here it is again. David speaks to his soul and gives it instructions. He does not allow his feelings to give him directions. His mind tells his soul what to do. And it is great advice. Wait for God. Trust in God. Never mind your circumstance. Never mind your feelings. Never mind the enemy's voice in your ear. Place your full expectation on what God will do.

Psalm 119:49 (NKJV)

49 Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope.

Here David is speaking to God. He is appealing to God to remember his promises. That is how the best praying is done. Quote God to God. You will have powerful prayers. And what does David do when he hears a promise of God? He hopes. He looks forward to God fulfilling what He has promised.

Psalm 119:116 (NKJV)

116 Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; And do not let me be ashamed of my hope.

Here again David prays. And how does he pray? He prays based upon what God has promised. He prays according to what God has said. Now David had some promises that had to be fulfilled **in this life**. He had specific promises for what he would do in this life. That is not **as** true for us as it was for him. We could die at any time and it would not undo any of the promises of God to us. That was not true for David. So David was appealing to God for God to honor Himself by honoring His promises to David. Again, we see how to most effectively pray. Praying in Jesus name is essentially praying according to Jesus's promises. I really like what he said to God. **Do not let me be ashamed of my hope**. Don't let my hope in you become an embarrassment. He is appealing to God **to honor Himself**. He is appealing to God for God **to glorify Himself**. He is essentially telling God, all my eggs are in your basket. I am fully trusting in you to provide for me what you promised. Don't let me down. Don't make yourself look bad. When you approach God like that, you are in a very good state. When you invest in God, there is always a rich return on your investment.

Psalm 119:166 (NKJV)

166 LORD, I hope for Your salvation, And I do Your commandments.

Here again we see David's hope. He is hoping for God to provide salvation. Now in David's circumstance he was likely counting on God to save him from his present circumstances. And with what God had promised **to Him**, he should have. For us, we take that salvation a little more ultimately. We should follow David's example by **hoping in the salvation** that will come when our life ends. We hope in that salvation with all that we have. And we can do so with complete confidence.

But look what goes with that hope in David's life. Obedience. They are coupled. How can you look forward to a reward if you do not trust your God enough to obey Him? That makes no sense. If you hope in God, you have fuel for your obedience. Hope removes the need for everything to be pleasant right now. Hope allows you to put off your reward to a present time.

Psalm 130:5 (NKJV)

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.

David was a man after God's own heart. As such he teaches us how to live, how to think.

David was waiting for God to deliver on His promises. And he had his soul in line with his mind. That is success in faithful living. When our mind and soul agree on depending upon God, we are in a peaceful state. We may not be in peaceful circumstances, but our soul is in a good state.

But look at what David hopes in. God's word.

Remember we mentioned this earlier. Depending upon God and depending upon God's word is the same thing. There is no problem here. David is utterly dependent upon what God has promised Him. He is actively aligning his expectations based on what God has said.

Isn't that what it is all about? Isn't that exactly what we too, are called to do. We hope in God's word. And God's word promises to us so many good things. Some are for here and now. And some are for eternity. And we can take them to the bank of God in prayer at any time. We can depend upon them. We can base our hope, our future expectations, upon them. And we will be right 100% of the time. Now that is our lives as Christians.

Maybe you are here this morning and you are not in Christ.

If you are not in a relationship with God, these verses describe your condition

Ephesians 2:12 (NKJV)

12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

And this

Ephesians 4:17 (NKJV)

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,

If you do not have a hope, you can have one. If this has gripped you this morning, if it has really bothered you that you are not confident of your eternal state, that can be remedied. If what I have been talking about is strange to you, it needn't remain strange.

You can have hope. It is held out to you in the gospel. You can rest in confidence that you are in Christ, and as such have all the privileges of one of his children.

But in order to do so you must come to Christ on his terms.

You must admit that you are a sinner and deserve his eternal punishment for that sin. You must realize that it is **only Christ** who could have rescued you. He took the full brunt of God's wrath upon himself for every person, like you and me, who He would ever call to Himself. And he paid for all their sin. The only way you can come to Christ is to receive that truth for yourself. You must, by faith receive that gift on your behalf and believe in Christ. And then, from here on in, trust him as Your Hope. You receive Him as your savior and Lord.

There is nothing more important this morning than leaving this meeting with a sure and certain hope.

And for you who have this hope, clarify your expectations by reading God's word. Let your hope only be based on what God says.