**JESUS: THE HOPE OF CHRISTMAS**

**(Romans 15:8-13)**

This year, there was a four-way tie for third place at the close of the football season in the Big 12. One of those teams was Iowa State. Success on the gridiron, is something that is relatively new to the Cyclones. Back in the days of the Big 8, they were pretty weak.

Years ago, there was a bookstore on the campus of Iowa State that would put up a banner before each game. When they were playing Kansas, they hung a big banner up that said, “Kill Kansas.” Iowa State lost. When they faced Washington, the big banner said, “Whip Washington.” The Cyclones lost. Here’s a true story. This was back when the Nebraska Cornhuskers were a real powerhouse. When Nebraska was next on the schedule, the bookstore put up a banner in their window that read, “Maintain dignity against Nebraska.”

As this year’s season was nearing the end, the OU Sooners held on to their hope of being one of the four teams to make it the NCAA Division I playoffs. That hope was realized. The hope now is to maintain dignity against the LSU Tigers, the #1 team. It appears that most football prognosticators are not giving OU much hope. Time will tell.

The way we use the word *hope* and the way the NT uses *hope* is very different. We view *hope* as a preferred future for which we wish. I hope my team wins. I hope my family stays healthy. I hope I sleep well tonight. These things may or may not happen, but my wish is that they would.

The NT, however, sees hope as the certainty of a future event. In the letter of Titus, Paul said that the return of Jesus is our blessed hope. It is not that we would prefer that Jesus would come back. No. We know that Jesus is going to come back. Of that we are certain.

Today, and over the next two Sundays, we are going to focus on who Jesus is to us, as He relates to the Christmas story. This morning we will consider, “Jesus: The Hope of Christmas.” This truth is found in Romans 15:8-13.

We listened to the hymn, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,* because that hymn beautifully presents this longing that we have for the coming of Christ to our world. This same longing is expressed in our passage in Romans 15. This desire does not just exist just in the heart of the Jews; it is also present in the hearts of people throughout the world. The fourth verse of the hymn in our hymnal refers to “the desire of nations.” There goes out the universal call that God would “fill all the world with heaven’s peace.”

Romans 15 functions much the same way. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles widens the lens of his camera, so to speak, to show us that the coming of Christ isn’t just good news for the Jews. His coming will brighten the lives of all people. It is good news for the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

Based on this passage, I am going to make five statements about hope.

1. **SINCE JESUS IS THE OBJECT OF OUR HOPE, WE PRAISE HIM.**

Look at v. 8. Notice how Paul speaks of Jesus in this verse. He used the title “Christ,” which means the Messiah for whom the Jews were looking. It means *the anointed One.* It speaks of His Kingship. Jesus is the rightful King who is coming to reign. But, instead of reigning as King, this Messiah comes to serve. That is an odd thing. A King is to be served; yet, Jesus the Messiah comes to serve.

Jesus said as much in both Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, “The Son of Many came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Look at what this truth does for the Gentiles. It causes us to glorify God for His mercy.

Jesus is not a parochial Savior. He is not a small, tribal deity. His concern and His reach are global. He came to save people from every tribe, race, language, and nation. I am reminded of hymn #68 in our hymnal. The first line of that hymn reads, “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy like the wideness of the sea . . .” The third verse begins, “for the love of God is broader than the measure of man’s mind.”

Between vv. 9-12, Paul draws from four different OT texts to support his case that God has a plan for the Gentiles. The first quotation is from Psalm 18:49. It is a psalm of David.

1. *David Will Praise God Among the Gentiles.*

The Gentiles can look on as David praises God. There is much to be learned by watching people worship God. It should birth within us a hunger to know and experience the presence of God in our own lives.

The second text is Deuteronomy 32:43.

1. *Moses Invites the Gentiles to Worship with God’s People.*

This reminds me of learning to drive. First, you watch your parents drive. Then, when you are 15½ you get a permit. You can drive with a licensed driver in the car.

So, first we watch people worship. Then, we worship with those who know God.

Many churches who practice what is called generational worship have worship opportunities for children to worship on a children’s level, and young adults to worship in a way that speaks to them, and older adults to worship in the manner that best fits them.

I am a proponent of intergenerational worship. I would prefer to gather young and old alike, and together we can experience the wonder and glory of our God. You may have a kid’s table at your family feasts, but I believe the worship table should be wide enough to seat everyone. I believe children learn to worship by watching adults worship, and older generations are encouraged by watching the younger people worship the same God they know.

1. *The Psalmist Releases the Gentiles to Worship God.*

The third text from which Paul quotes is Psalm 117:1. Let’s look at that psalm. Many people know that Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Book of Psalms. It has 176 verses. Psalm 117, however, is the shortest psalm in the Hebrew song book with just two verses. While it is the shortest, it is also the widest. It calls upon all people and all nations to worship God. This is not an invitation; it is a command. To not worship God is outright disobedience, rebellion against God.

Whatever commands God gives to is, is given for our good. The truth is that we benefit when we worship God. There are all kinds of benefits of worship. **There is personal benefit.** One person observed, “Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will be soon yield to that which is around us.” So, truly worshipping the true God will serve to strengthen us and will help us to fight off the temptations that comes against us.

**True worship benefits the church.** It unites us. It inspires us. It brings new life. It challenges us to move forward in our faith.

**True worship benefits those outside the church.** One person wrote, “When we sincerely worship God with our mouths, we will also serve God with our hands.” We will minister to the world around us when we worship well. We will become a healing community seeking to care for the souls that God brings to us.

The fourth text Paul quotes comes from is Isaiah 11:10. Consider this phrase “the root of Jesse.” Jesse was the father of King David. The Messiah was to come from the line of David. That means, the root of Jesse is referring the birth of the Messiah. When He comes, He will rule the Gentiles, and the Gentiles will place their hope in Him.

1. *The Gentiles will Embrace Jesus as the Savior of the World.*

Jesus is not just a Jewish Messiah. He is the King for all the world. Likewise, the Christian religion is not the white man’s religion. It is not just for North America and Europe. Jesus is the Savior for the entire world. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Bible teaches that Satan is a master of promoting substitutes. He has a substitute religion, substitute worship, and a substitute hope. Instead of a Jesus-centered gospel, he offers us a man-centered gospel, which is no gospel at all.

I happen to be a fan of Kellogg’s Raisin Bran cereal. I know there are substitutes out there that cost less, but to me, they don’t taste as good. Shortly after we were married, Ruth Ann bought one of those substitutes because it was less expensive. I tried it. I was disappointed. I promptly instructed her to only buy Kellogg’s Raisin Bran cereal which she has been faithful to do.

We have a saying in our culture, “You get what you pay for.” That’s generally true, but it doesn’t work that way in the Kingdom of Christ. The offer of salvation through Christ is free. There is nothing you do to pay for salvation. It is free because Jesus has already paid the price. On the cross Jesus cried, “It is finished.” He was saying, “Payment made in full.”

If you attempt to gain salvation through one of Satan’s cheap alternatives, you will discover that the real price is always higher than his advertised price.

Jesus is the object of our hope. We are to praise Him.

1. **SINCE GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE, WE GO TO HIM.**

Look at the first phrase in v. 13, “May the God of hope fill you.” Earlier in the chapter, Paul referred to God as “the God of endurance and encouragement” (v. 5). When God is said to be the God of something, that means He is the source of that thing.

For us to gain something, we have to go to its source. When you need groceries, you go the store. When we need milk at our house, we go to Braum’s because as far as I am concerned, that is the only place to buy the milk. When you need medical care, you go to the doctor’s office or the hospital. When you need anything, whatever it might be, you go to the source.

That being the case, when you need hope, you go to the one, reliable source—God Himself. Our God is the God of hope. Our hope is found from Him because our hope is set on His Son.

Look with me at Ephesians 2:12. When you are without God, you are devoid of hope. The phrase “having no hope” is situated between the words “strangers to the covenants of promise” and “without God in the world.” The implication is that if you have intimate knowledge of the promises of Scripture, and if you have a relationship with God in this world, you will have a sure and certain hope. I believe hope can be found in the marvelous promises of God because that is the starting place of developing a relationship with God.

Let me tell you the story of Everett Storms. Mr. Storms was a school teacher in Canada. One day, he decided to find out how many promises there are in the Bible. For a year and a half, Mr. Storms read the Bible over and over, isolating all the promises. After his 27th reading of the entire Bible, Mr. Storms concluded that there are 7,487 promises from God to man in the Bible. Here are just a few of them:

* I will bless you—Genesis 12:2
* I will not fail you—Joshua 1:5
* I will heal you—2 Kings 20:5
* I will guide you—Psalm 32:8
* I will instruct you—Psalm 32:8
* I will teach you—Psalm 32:8
* I will deliver you—Psalm 50:15
* I will satisfy you—Psalm 132:15
* I will help you—Isaiah 41:10
* I will strengthen you—Isaiah 41:10
* I will uphold you—Isaiah 41:10
* I will hold your hand—Isaiah 42:6
* I will not forget you—Isaiah 49:15
* I will comfort you—Isaiah 66:13
* I will restore you—Jeremiah 30:17
* I will forgive you—Jeremiah 31:34
* I will put My Spirit within you—Ezekiel 36:27
* I will be your God—Ezekiel 36:28
* I will save you—Ezekiel 36:27, 29
* I will come again—John 14:3
* I will manifest Myself—John 14:21
* I will love Him who obeys Me—John 14:21
* I will give you a crown of life—Revelation 2:10
* I will come in and eat with you—Revelation 3:20

Don’t those promises of God minister hope to your heart? We serve a God who makes and keeps promises.

1. **SINCE JOY AND PEACE ARE THE COMPANIONS OF HOPE, WE ACCEPT**

**THEM.**

Look at how v. 13 continues: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace.” Whenever hope enters, joy and peace come along, too. They are traveling companions. Wherever hope travels, it never travels alone. Joy and peace tag along.

Apart from the Bible, one of the greatest books ever written was penned by a man without a high school education. His name was John Bunyan. He was a Baptist preacher in England at a time when only Church of England preachers were licensed to preach, and without a license, it was against the law to preach. John Bunyan was arrested for preaching without a license. He would have been allowed to leave the jail if he would just promise not to preach. He couldn’t make that promise because he knew that is exactly what he was going to do. He spent 13 years in jail. While he was in jail, he wrote the book, *Pilgrim’s Progress.* It was written in the latter half of the 1600’s. It is an allegory in which the names of people and places symbolize virtues and vices. The book if about a man named Christian who is traveling from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. He is traveling from earth to heaven. The story powerfully illustrates how people intersect our lives for either good or ill.

Consider the names of some of the people Christian encountered along his journey (Evangelist, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Sloth, Presumption, Faithful, Discontent, Mr.Live-loose, Mr. High-mind, Lord Fair-speech, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Money-love, Giant Despair, and Great-Grace. Christian ended his journey with the help of a companion named Hopeful.

In the story, the City of Heaven lay on a hill beyond a river. No one can get to heaven expect that he crosses the river. The river represents death. As Christian entered the river, he began to despair, but Hopeful began to encourage him. With Hopeful’s help, Christian made it to the other side and eventually all the way to the Celestial City, to heaven.

In the end, hope is what we all need.

1. **SINCE FAITH IS THE CONDITION OF OUR HOPE, WE EMPLOY IT.**

Hope doesn’t come to whomever and whenever. There is a condition, and the condition is faith. We must trust God. Look again at v. 13. The prayer is that God would grant us hope “in believing.”

If God is the reservoir of hope, then faith is the channel through which that hope passes. Our faith in God accesses the hope of God.

One of the great hymns of the faith is “The Solid Rock.” It is hymn #402 in our hymnal. The first verse reads:

My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand

All other ground is sinking sand.

This hymn was written by Edward Mote in 1834. Mote reported that one Sunday he had written the first four verses and stuck the words in his pocket before going to church that morning. While he was at church, a Brother King informed him that his wife was very ill, and he asked Edward if he would join him in calling on his wife. Mr. King wanted to sing a song and pray with his wife, but he couldn’t find his hymn book. Edward pulled the newly written hymn out of his pocket, taught it to Mr. and Mrs. King, and the three of them sang it for the first time. Mrs. King was so touched by the hymn that Mr. Mote had the hymn printed.

Jesus is the One on whom we are to lean and on whom we are to stand. We do that by faith, and it is by faith that we receive the hope, joy, and peace He wants us to have.

1. **SINCE THE SPIRIT IS THE POWER OF HOPE, WE BOW TO HIM.**

It is the Spirit of God who applies God’s word to our hearts and enables us to respond to God with faith. He is the One who makes it possible for us to have hope. He is the One who helps us to abound in hope. For that reason, we should surrender ourselves to His control. That is what I mean when I way, “We are to bow to Him.”

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

Instead of saying “what lies within us,” I think we should change that to “Who lies within us.” The fact that the Spirit of God lives within us is much more important and more powerful than our past heartaches and our future problems. The Spirit of God is so much bigger than our circumstances. We simply need to surrender to His control.

According to Pastor Ben Patterson, the author Nathaniel Hawthorne once described happiness as a butterfly. He said that when you pursue the butterfly attempting to catch it, it is always just beyond your grasp. If, however, you sit down quietly, that butterfly just might light upon you.

So it is with the Spirit of God. He is not seized. He is received. The good news is that we receive the Spirit of God when we receive Christ by faith. When He comes into our lives, He enables us to abound in hope.

I started this message with a football story, but I want to end it with a story from the world of basketball. The second winningest coach in NCAA history is Bobby Knight with 902 career victories as a head coach. While he ended his career as the coach of the Texas Tech Red Raiders, his greatest success was at the University of Indiana where he won 3 NCCA championships, a slew of Big Ten Championships and where he was named National Coach of the Year four or five times.

After concluding his coaching career, Coach Knight wrote a book entitled, *The Power of Negative Thinking.* The book has a provocative title, and I don’t agree with everything he claims, but he makes a good argument. He wrote that *hope* is the worst word in the English language. He said that it’s foolish and lazy to tell yourself that things are going to be all right. He argues that things will only be all right if someone steps and *does* something.

Our hope is built on the fact that Jesus stepped up and did something, and we are going to be more than okay because of what He did.