

Romans 15:7-13 NIV

“What’s the status of your hope?”

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁽⁸⁾ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs ⁽⁹⁾ so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; ‘I will sing hymns to your name.’ ⁽¹⁰⁾ Again, it says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’

⁽¹¹⁾ And again, ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.’ ⁽¹²⁾ And again, Isaiah says, ‘The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.’

⁽¹³⁾ “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.”

Every language contains “four-letter-words.”

In polite speech, we don’t use some of these terms.

Film directors use them for shock effect.

Teens voice them to sound chic.

Even four-year-olds pick up four-letter-words.

Comic David Letterman once poked fun at a newly-hired TV anchor in Bismarck, ND.

It came on his first broadcast after he moved from the East coast.

His co-anchor was already on the air; then the camera switched to him.

He was to report on an incident involving a certain fellow.

The man’s name appeared on the teleprompter in front of the reporter.

Pronouncing that name would have challenged the tongue of a trained elocutionist.

The newscaster evidently forgot he was on the air.

In frustration he blurted a four-letter word.

The TV station owners fired their new anchor.

Do you suppose the station owners used any four-letter-words when they terminated the fellow?

Many of us hear four-letter-words every day.

We generally call them curse words.

Of course you don’t need a swearword to curse.

You may have heard this old Arab anti-blessing:

“May the fleas of a thousand camels infest your armpits.”



An old Yiddish curse states it more subtly:

"May you inherit a shipload of gold; may it not be enough to pay your doctor's bills."

I hope Norma and our children can say that they never heard me say four-letter-curse words.

Not all four-letter-words express curses.

Today’s topic is a good four-letter-word—hope.

You see it happen often.

When we quit hoping; we quit living.

That’s likely why Francis Bacon said,

“Hope is a good breakfast, but it is a bad supper.”

It’s all right for young folks to hope when starting life, some think.

Kids are entitled to dream.

But many consider just sitting and hoping a waste of time—“pipe dreams.”

In fact Benjamin Franklin wrote:

“He that lives upon hope will die fasting.”¹

An ancient Greek fable contended:

“Zeus gave man a vessel full of good things, but that man, filled with curiosity, lifted the lid, so that all good things escaped to the gods and when the lid was put back only ελπίς (hope) was trapped, man’s present comfort.”



So “Hope is easily deceived and is dangerous . . .”²

Rabbi Baruch Silverstein related the following:

In the barbaric concentration camps, six million Jews met a savage death. An elderly rabbi interned in Auschwitz *was* subjected to the cruelest tortures the satanic German mind could invent.

What pained him most was the suffering inflicted upon his fellow inmates. He constantly prayed to God to alleviate their suffering and on many occasions, risking his life, intervened with the high camp officials.

He shared his daily ration with the weak and the sick. Whenever conditions permitted, he volunteered to perform the most degrading tasks assigned to the victims.

In spite of the strict camp regulations prohibiting the rabbi from conducting religious services, he counseled his fellow prisoners and comforted them and arranged secret prayer meetings and Torah sessions.

“After one of these ‘violations,’ the saintly and compassionate rabbi was sentenced to death by public hanging.

¹ Poor Richard’s Almanac, 1758

² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II, p. 519 (Original source, Democr. Fr., 287)

“As he walked attired in his torn and blood-stained *tallit* to the gallows, his lips continued to move in an endless stream of prayers, and his hands waved encouraging farewells to the gathered, muted crowd.

“In the last minutes of his life, the rabbi was overheard to offer the following meditation: ‘Almighty God, *Ribbono shel Olam*, Rock of Israel, like the Jewish martyrs of all ages, I surrender to Thy Divine judgment and Thine inscrutable will. One question, however, I must reverently place before Thee, my Father in Heaven; I should not mind all this suffering if I only knew that it was Thy will; I should accept uncomplainingly all this pain if I only knew that it was for Thy sake. But is this fate really Thy will and for Thy sake?’”³

This loving rabbi served others unselfishly.

- He suffered horribly.
- He felt intense loneliness.
- But he never had the assurance that he was doing God’s will—“Is this fate really Thy will and for Thy sake?”

In what do you base your hope?



³ *Unclaimed Treasures*, p -56

Is it in your intelligence, your strength, your good looks, your ability to talk, your accomplishments, or your net worth?

People fix hopes in media stars, sports idols, science, money, politicians, teachers, and preachers.

This verse in our text is vital.

“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.”

Real hope has at least three qualities.

1. Hope is specific.

Hope isn’t simply optimism that everything always works out well in the end.

Battles persist between pessimism and optimism.

“The optimist proclaims that we live in the best of all possible worlds, and the pessimist fears this is true.”⁴ Or

“An optimist is a guy that has never had much experience.”⁵

And, “A pessimist is a person who has been compelled to live with an optimist.”⁶

⁴ James Branch Cabell, *The Silver Stallion*, 1926

⁵ Don Marquis, *archy and mehitabel*, 1927

⁶ Elbert Hubbard, *The Note-Book*, 1927

If life ends at the cemetery, pessimists are right, aren’t they?

That’s what confounded the writer of Ecclesiastes.
Rich and poor, optimists and pessimists
all end up in the cemetery.

Hope isn’t just optimism.

2. Hope requires a reliable, permanent basis.

We base most of our hopes in people and things.

When I was young, I idolized a few ministers—if only I could preach like they did. Even before they died, most of them let me down.

Some by their moral lapses.

A few turned me off because they always tried to sell their books to me.

Emily Bronte described one Christian leader:

“He was, and is yet, most likely, the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses on his neighbours.”



Human beings and their organizations will always disappoint us.

Even when we detect no wrong in them, they still grow old and leave us.

Base your hope on anything human; expect a crash to dash your faith.

3. Because only God is immortal and perfect, He alone is the reliable basis for 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.”

One more story ties our lesson together.

Perhaps you recall this scene in the movie, Dr. Zhivago:

Talking with Tanya, the Comrade General asks her, "How did you come to be lost?"

She replies, "Well, I was just lost."

He asks again, "No, how did you come to be lost?"

Tanya didn't want to say and said simply, "I was just lost. My father and I were running through the city and it was on fire. The revolution had come and we were trying to escape and I was lost."

The Comrade General asked more emphatically, "How did you come to be lost?"

Tanya still didn't want to say, but finally said.

"We were running through the city and my father let go of my hand and I was lost."

Then Tanya added plaintively, "He let go."

This is what she didn't want to say.

The Comrade General said, "This is what I've been trying to tell you, Tanya. Komarov was not your real father. Zhivago is your real father and I can promise you, Tanya, that if this man had been there, your real father, he would never have let go of your hand."

Isn't that's the difference between a real father and a false one?

A real father would never let go of his child's hand.

Neither does the true God.

“I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Many people idolize false gods—power, physical appearance, wealth, the approval of their peers, etc.

Sooner or later these gods fail or betray you.

Their glory and power are temporary...
they let go of your hand.



Only God our Creator is sufficient.

The Eternal God made Himself known in Jesus of Nazareth.

On the cross, Jesus died to forgive every one of us of our failure

In coming back from the dead, Jesus defeated our great enemy death.

When we accept Jesus and his words guide us, His Holy Spirit lives in us to help us each day.

Jesus will return to judge the world, and definitely keep his promises:

He'll raise every person from the grave, correct all wrong, and punish all evildoers.

He'll give believers new, immortal bodies.

Therefore we can work joyfully, peacefully, and patiently in love with everyone.

That means we forgive, as we've been forgiven;

We help others find God's kingdom.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-7 NIV)

Hold onto God's hand; he'll never let go of yours.

“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.”

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