

Roman 15:4-7

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, beloved. It's very good to see you here today with us.! And I'm so thankful to see so many guests on this special Easter morning.

! Certainly, our Savior is risen, and not just on this day, but He has been for quite some time. And our freedom, our life, and our joy is bought by His person and by His work.

So, I'm glad to be back today. Last week, I was traveling with Daniel Gentry, a member of our church, to the country of Nicaragua. We decided to undertake a cross-country drive, which we were able to find almost no information about.

We even, in Managua, at the airport, were asking the car rental folks, is there a road that gets where we're going? And they had never heard of where we were going. We trusted with a little bit of information that, by God's providence, He would get us there.

And the very beginning of Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 3, says that Jesus upholds the universe by the word of His power. And that's true in all circumstances, all the time.

[1 : 09] It's more evidenced in some circumstances, like Daniel Gentry and I driving across Nicaragua, speaking no Spanish at all. But as we were singing, Wes, I'm glad he did the Spanish version of that song.

There's a good chance that I spoke in tongues down there, because people seemed to understand what I was saying in my very southern English, and we managed to get across the country and back safely.

And I'll share later some more of what happened during that time. But today, I want you to turn with me to the book of Romans, chapter 15. We've been working our way, verse by verse, through the book of Romans.

We're coming to a close, I think another maybe six weeks to eight, and we will finish out the book together. And we have come together today to chapter 15, verse 4.

And we're going to look today together at verse 4 through verse 7. For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

[2 : 24] May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. Let's pray together. Father God, I pray this morning by the power of your Spirit that you will speak to us by your Word.

We recognize this morning, Lord, that our preaching is in vain if Christ is not risen, and we praise you for that reality. That he is seated at your right hand even now, interceding for us, that our prayers would be heard by you because we're clothed in his righteousness.

So we come to you humbly, asking that you work amongst us, recognizing that we are your people, and you want good things for us from your Word.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So some of you, I know, may already be wondering why we're in Romans chapter 15, looking at verse 4 through 7.

[3 : 35] And I will say to you, that's because that's where we are in the Scriptures. Many today are going to pause from whatever their preaching schedule is to preach a special Easter sermon.

And I say to you that every sermon is an Easter sermon. Because every sermon contains within it the beauties, the glories of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that includes his resurrection. So we'll certainly talk about that this morning. We're going to talk about that in the light of these truths that Paul's been trying to show us, the workings out of the

Gospel, which he's presented in the first 11 chapters of this book.

But before we go any further, I want to take a pause from Romans chapter 15 to address quickly a social issue going on in our country right now. It's going to be very, very brief, and then we're going to move on.

Currently, right now, the Supreme Court is debating DOMA, the Defense of Marriage Act. And we may see that repealed in our country. Gay marriage may become a reality very soon in our country. [4 : 39] And I just want to say two things to you, if this comes about. Firstly, the federal government legalizing homosexual marriage in no way affects the sanctity of your marriage.

Look to your personal holiness. Husbands, lead your wives. Pastor, provide and protect for her.

Wives, submit to your husbands just as the church submits to Christ.

Raise your kids well. Be a living example of what healthy marriage should look like in this world. It's meant to be a picture of Christ and the relationship with his church.

Just continue to do that. It doesn't destroy your marriage. If you think it does, come see me. We've got a lot to talk about. Secondly, our primary goal as Christians is not to prevent gay marriage.

Our primary goal as Christians is not to prevent gay marriage. It's the redemption of souls. So stay calm and carry on.

[5 : 48] Continue to propagate the gospel. Continue to speak to people's hearts. Because people really don't change until their hearts change. And so let's keep soldiering on together. Expect that this world is going to get worse.

It's going to happen all around us. Not just this issue. This is one amongst many ways that our culture is rejecting almighty God and his standard for us. So keep calm.

Carry on. Continue to present the gospel in every possible way. Close that. Back to Romans chapter 15. I want to bring to you four observations from the text this morning.

And if you'll allow, I'm actually going to begin with verse 7. So we're going to begin with verse 7 and then we'll jump back up to verse 4. Because we're going to start with the first observation, which is that we have been welcomed by Christ.

And therefore he is our example for what Paul is trying to say to us here in this text. That we ought to welcome one another. Chapter 14 has been all about the fact that there are these non-clear issues in our Christian faith.

[6 : 53] These things that are now permissible to us as Christians, but may or may not be beneficial. Gray areas, so to speak. I've said to you previously that they're non-issues that we tend to make into issues.

And they develop and they form into legalism. And we tend to bash each other and beat each other up over these non-primary things. So let's not make issues out of non-issues.

Let's continue to persevere and press on in the truth of the gospel with one another. And Christ here is set up as our supreme example for that. And I think it's so fitting that as he's coming to the close of his exhortations to us, the way that we're supposed to work the gospel out, that he ends it with Christ just as he began it with Christ.

So you remember back in chapter 12, verse 1, he says, Brethren, by the mercies of God, I appeal to you by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

And now he's working out what this life sacrifice to God looks like. So you would say, but wait, is that really starting with Christ? And I would say to you, yes, in the first 11 chapters. That's where he began with these doctrines of the gospel, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone forever.

[8 : 10] That that is the way in which we stand right before God, not by any work that we can do on our own, not by any pressing of our own, but by his great work on our behalf.

So he begins it with Christ and he ends it here in verse 7 with Christ once again. So therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.

It is Easter Sunday, is it not? I'd be remiss if we didn't read an Easter Sunday text. Luke chapter 24, verse 1 through 7. I invite you to turn there with me.

Chapter 24, verse 1, the book of Luke, the gospel of Luke. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

[9 : 19] And as they were frightened and bowed their face to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and on the third day, rise.

So as we saw in the story, the presentation from the Jesus Storybook Bible, and I wish I had an English accent, because I think you would hear it better if I did, right? We had this dark grieving, this darkness that stood over the Christians, those who had devoted their lives to Christ, who were following him, thinking that he had come to conquer in a different way than he did.

He was crucified. And here's some women that come to serve him just the same, to continue the preparation of burial, to put spices there in the tomb.

Sad, mourning over this loss. And they get there, and he is risen. He has conquered death on our behalf in that great act.

We don't just talk about the death of Christ. We talk about the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of these things are key and important to our understanding of the Gospel.

[10 : 35] That he bore for us the wrath of our sin. He died. The ultimate penalty for sin was buried and then resurrected. He conquered death on our behalf.

The person and the work of Jesus Christ is so important for us to understand. There are many people across the world today that are sitting in services thinking that the very act of coming to an Easter service in some way puts them in right standing with God.

If I go on Christmas and celebrate his birth, I go on Easter Sunday, I celebrate his resurrection, he'll find me just. Nicaragua is this way.

There's a lot of religion down there, but I think very little Christianity. Lots of striving on their own part to be found right before God. And I ask the question to so many people that we sat and talked with, when you stand before God, how will you be judged?

If you're found right, why will you be found right? And more often than not, I got blank stares. So I fed him the answer. You'll be found right because you placed your faith in Christ, right?

[11 : 49] In his person and his work. In the things that he has done for you. And all of you have added to the equation is belief. You believe that when you get there, when you're finally judged, you'll stand before God and he will say to you, well done my good and faithful servant, because you're found in Christ.

That is the beauty of Christianity. Of what our God has done for us. It depends not at all on us. I've used the analogy of a whitewater river before here as I've been a whitewater paddler and talked about how the end of our life, if we're not found in Christ, is certain destruction.

It's a massive waterfall. That we're going to go over. And this river is so wide that by our greatest efforts of swimming upstream, away from this peril that's behind us, we'll never, ever, ever be able to work our way to the safety of the shore unless someone comes to get us.

Really, that analogy falls short. In even talking about us trying to swim, right? We can't do anything to gain our own salvation. Really, we're dead in our trespasses and our sin.

Right? Really, we're dead and we're limp already headed towards our destruction. But Jesus Christ comes because of the person in the world, because of what he's done for us. He comes and he plucks us out and he puts us safely on the shore.

[13 : 16] He pumps the water out of our lungs. He revives us and gives us life in him. This is so incredibly important to recognize and that the resurrection is one of the many keys that are so important for that to happen.

We have life because he is alive. Seated for us now, holding the world by the power of his word, what glorious, glorious truths these are.

John chapter 8, verse 31 through 36. Record, So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

They answered him, We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say you will become free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

The slave does not remain in the house forever. For the Son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. So you see that these truths that I'm stating, these things about the personal work of Christ, are the overarching truths of this world.

[14:40] Every other truth is bound up in this, what Jesus Christ has accomplished for his church. And if we will abide in that truth, we will be set free by the Son.

Now our text before us today talks also about the Scriptures, does it not? So our second point, just as Christ has welcomed us, those who were once enemies of God, utterly incapable of our own righteousness, he has welcomed us to set the example of the way we ought to welcome one another.

The second point I want to make today, the observation, is that the Scriptures have been given to us for the blessing of hope. Look here at verse 4.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. Whatever was written in the former days.

So Paul was referring here to what we would call the Old Testament. These are the Scriptures that he's referencing at this point. The rest of the Scripture hadn't been canonized yet at this point.

[15:49] It hadn't been accepted as part of the revealed words of God. And so he's talking about the Old Testament here and directly he's referencing verse 3, the last half, here in chapter 15, where Jesus quotes from Psalm 69, 9, which is David speaking, but so much more so to Christ, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

So he's specifically referencing Psalm 69, 9 as he talks about those things written in former days. The general instruction of the Scriptures is included in that for us, right? For our instruction.

But more than that, all of their Scripture to that date, and certainly all that had been added since then, shows us Christ, his person, and his work.

Now many Christians don't believe this. Many Christians ignore the Old Testament altogether. They look to the New. Have you ever heard a Christian say that? I'm kind of a New Testament Christian. What does that mean?

What are you even talking about? The Old Testament was enough for people to know that they needed a Savior. We've just now seen the revealing of all that, the working of it all out.

[17:05] In fact, the Old Testament is quoted 263 times in the New Testament. Jesus quoted it 78 times. Paul, just in the book of Romans, quotes it 84 times.

The Old Testament gave us what we needed to know to know that we needed a Savior. The New Testament reveals Him to us. When Jesus Christ came on the scene, the Jews should have known. Had it been capable for them to understand and wrap their minds around, if the Scriptures weren't spiritually discerned, they should have known. All the keys were there for them to see Him, and they missed it. The Old Testament is so important, we actually distribute as Americans just New Testaments.

I got a box in the mail from the North American Mission Board. We didn't ask for it, but a box of New Testaments. I think they want us to give them out. I'm not really sure. They sent us a box of New Testaments in the mail.

All the Scriptures are precious. I'll hand you a book of Romans. In there is all you need to know to come to Christ, for sure. But we, as Christians, we even divorce the book.

[18:17] We put it in half. You know, that's the Old Testament. We've got the New Testament now. It's all valuable. It's all precious because it all speaks of Christ.

He even says here in verse 4, we're given these Scriptures, the endurance through encouragement of the Scriptures, that we might have hope. And what is it that we're to hope in?

Christ. For what? What do we hope in Christ for? We hope in Christ for future glory. A few chapters back, Romans chapter 8, is all about that.

Longing for future glory. All about waiting for us to be finally fixed up the way we were meant to be, the way we were created to be, unhindered by our flesh and the curse of sin.

Able to worship and praise God forever and ever. This is the future glory that we're longing for here in chapter 8. And you remember, it's been a long time since we've been in chapter 8 together, but this would have been read.

[19:21] So, future glory would have been present on the minds of the original readers of this letter as he talks about it. Look at chapter 8, verse 23 through 25 as he talks about the creation, the creation itself longing for things to be set right, longing for Christ to finally return and finish his sovereign purpose in this world.

And it says, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies, for in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. And this is what the Scriptures are meant to do for us, to remind us of this great hope, to give us endurance and encouragement as we patiently wait for the coming of our Lord.

The full fulfillment of all that he began in his death, burial, and resurrection. We want to see that come to culmination. We want to see him finish it all finally.

And that's what he's referring to here as we have a hope. The word endurance here in ESV may be in some of your Bibles as perseverance, patience. We see that in chapter 8.

[20 : 40] And encouragement. So do you value the whole counsel of God for what it does for you in that way? I hope that you do. I hope that you treasure this book.

This is an incredible book because these are the very words of God. Now granted, these are English translations of the very words of God.

But still, precious, dividing our souls, working in us. If you've never experienced the life that comes from the scriptures, pray that you will. They're of extreme value.

Let me just show you an example. Turn with me to the book of Psalm 119. Psalm 119. Psalm 119 being a psalm all about God's Word, His precepts, His orders, His law.

It's a very fascinating book. We'll probably look at it all together someday. Let me just pull out for you a few of the verses from here. Psalm 119, 46.

[21 : 51] I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be. I'm sorry. I'm reading the wrong one. 49. Remember your word to your servant in which you have made me hope.

119, 116. I marked these but I have a lot of them marked. That's why I'm having a hard time finding them. Psalm 119, 116.

Uphold me according to your promise that I may live and let me not be put to shame in my hope.

And Psalm 119, 166. I hope for your salvation, O Lord, and I do your commandments.

So do you see here to the psalmist who we believe is David, right? To the psalmist the very words of God is what he hoped in. He knew that God's word was sure.

Psalm 130, verse 5. I wait for the Lord. My soul waits. And in his word I hope.

[23 : 02] Because God's word to us is sure. If God doesn't keep his word, he ceases to be holy, he becomes a liar, and therefore he's not God. So by very definition, God himself cannot be a liar.

Numbers 23, verse 19 says, God is not man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should change his mind. Has he said and will he not do it?

Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it? So the scriptures for us are a great guide, a great promise of the hope that is to come.

So if we're to live in this way that Paul is showing us, we have Christ as our supreme example, having been welcomed by him, and then we have the scriptures as a blessing of hope.

Thirdly, God is the source of our endurance and our encouragement. Notice the first part of verse 5.

[24 : 09] May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another. May the God, the one who rules over endurance and encouragement.

So we see that the scriptures are a provision for, but God is the source of this endurance and this encouragement. And Paul's benediction here, his brief benediction, is that God would grant us to live in harmony with one another the way we ought.

That God would give it to us as a gift. We would call that in the church a grace. Something that we don't deserve. By his power, he would work in us harmony with one another.

So we see in this little benediction, we see Paul's movement, his exhortation to the Roman believers to have a great devotion to the scriptures and to prayer.

It follows that if our source for living in this way comes from God, that we must ask him for it. And God is faithful to provide to his children good things.

[25 : 22] Things that are within his will. This is a good, tested thing. This is something that Paul is saying to us we ought to be doing and therefore if we ask for it, we will receive this ability to live in harmony with one another.

To put aside the things that are non-issue, the gray things, and to focus on the primary things, the black and white things, right? To embrace each other, to welcome one another, and to live in this way is a great gift from God.

So we have the hope, we see it from the scriptures, what we ought to be doing and the way we ought to be living, and we pray that God will grant us the ability to do so. Recognize, I get the strain as we talk about God's sovereign hand in all things.

I fully understand that. I started out today talking about providence. I fully believe that Jesus Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father, by the power of his word, holds everything that happens in this world in his power, by his word, which is awesome because he's just speaking it and it happens.

everything is under his control. And I recognize then some of the strain that creates for us and our responsibility. I know what that does to your minds sometimes.

[26 : 36] I know what it does to your hearts because I've been there. We recognize here that Paul's benediction, asking that God would grant them to live in harmony with one another, is not inconsistent.

God uses our prayers as the means to his end. There's power in our prayer. God grants power to our prayer as the means to his end.

God wants to knit together his church. God wants to be called together perfect and holy and he uses the prayers of his people to accomplish that goal. Why? Because he loves you.

He doesn't just work it. He just doesn't make us into robots and we just go around loving one another. I love you, brother. Although I feel that way sometimes, right? But he asks that we fellowship with him, that we abide with him, that we come to him longing for the very things he longs to give us.

And he does that through the vehicle of prayer. Prayer is the breath of the Christian life, just as the scriptures are the bread. We need both.

[27 : 46] We need to be fed and we need to breathe oxygen as Christians. And when we stop doing one or the other, we'll very quickly die. Right? I have in recent years recognized my prayerlessness.

We must pray. It is a blessing to us. Let us take hold of it. So thirdly, that was God God is the source of endurance and encouragement.

And fourthly, and finally, all things work to the great end of God's glory. All things work to the great end of God's glory.

glory. So you see in verse 6 that together, as we live in this way, we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then notice in verse 7, as he speaks of Christ welcoming us, he did so for the glory of God.

Right? So we see here in both ways, we're meant to glorify God just as Christ glorified God as our supreme example of that.

[28 : 56] We're called to this together to not heap upon God something that isn't already his. We don't have things that he needs from us to make him great.

He already is great. He uses us as his church to show his greatness. So everything he does and works through us is to show himself as magnificent, to show himself as supreme, to show himself as glorious.

This is what's taking place in this activity. Christ knew that. He understood that completely. Christ did die for you. That's a reality.

That's true. But it's a lesser reality than the greater reality. Ultimately, Christ died for God. Christ died as the great expression of God's love and justice to the world.

I think all of God's story, the climax of it, comes together in the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ. He magnified himself. He showed himself in the greatest possible way to be him.

[30 : 08] As he came as a man, lowly, suffered, died on our behalf, but rose as a great conquering king. This is a beautiful, beautiful picture.

Christ knew that his overarching, his major purpose was to honor God as he died, was buried, and resurrected. We should know the same.

We tend to become so humanistic as Christians, so inward focused, so looking to ourselves. The gospel is ultimately not about us. The gospel is ultimately about God.

we get to receive the beautiful, precious, life-giving benefits of this greater truth. That God chose to reveal himself to man in this way.

We ought to praise him for it. Let's pray together.