

Romans 15:4-13

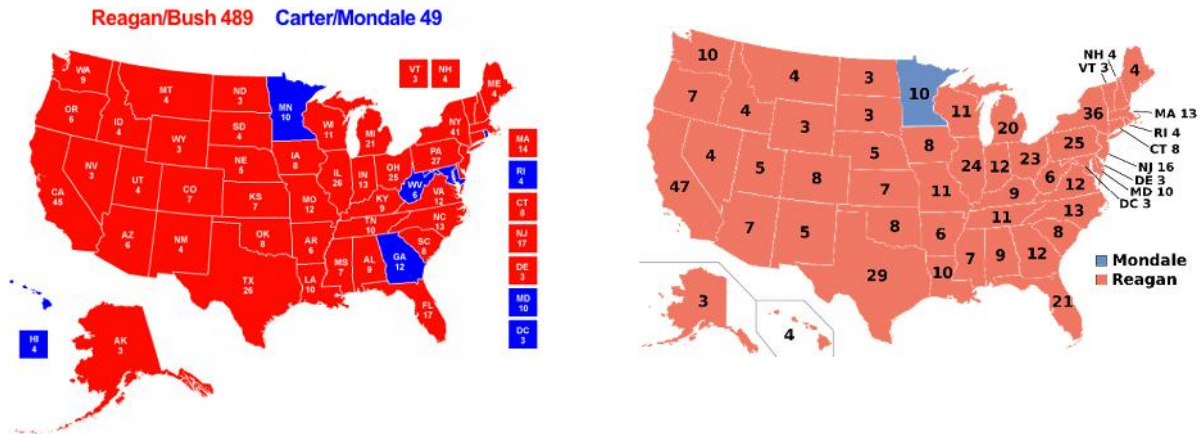
Listen to part of this hope-inspiring speech and think about who may have said it and why it was given.

The cause goes on. It's just one long battle in a long war, and it will go on as long as we live. You just stay in there, and you stay there with the same beliefs and the same faith that made you do what you're doing here. The individuals on this stage may change. The cause is there, and the cause will prevail because it is right.

Don't give up your ideals. Don't compromise. Don't turn to expediency. And don't for heaven's sake, having seen the inner workings of the watch, don't get cynical.

No, don't ever get cynical. Don't get cynical because look at yourselves and what you were willing to do, and recognize that there are millions and millions of Americans out there who want what you want. Who want it to be that way—who want it to be a shining city on a hill.

Any guesses? I read that this was one of the great, off the cuff political speeches of all time. It was given by Ronald Reagan on August 18, 1976 after he barely lost the Republican primary to Gerald Ford. And of course Reagan went on to win a landslide victory four years later which was eclipsed only by his 1984 win, which was the largest presidential victory in US history. Our neighbors to the west were the lone holdout in '84. Silly Minnesotans. ;-)



Reagan did not give up because he *had* hope and he *inspired* hope. Hope is what makes the difference between persevering and giving up. And Reagan knew that hope was the very opposite of cynicism. Cynicism kills hope. And I don't just mean in the political arena. You can get very cynical about God. "Well God let me down again, so why should I trust him? He hasn't answered my prayer, so why should I keep on praying?" That is cynicism-cynicism that has lost all hope, or is on the verge of losing hope.

This passage has hope as bookends with the gospel in the center. Follow along as I read it.

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. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

*"Therefore I will **praise you among the Gentiles,** and sing to your name." (Psalm 18:49)*

10 And again it is said,

*"**Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.**" (Deut. 32:43)*

11 And again,

*"**Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,** and let all the peoples extol him." (Psalm 117:1)*

12 And again Isaiah says,

*"The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises **to rule the Gentiles;** (Isaiah 11:10) in him will the Gentiles hope."*

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Did you see how hope is a bookend in verses 4 and 13?

4-That...we might have hope
13-So that...you may abound in hope

I trust that no one here has completely lost all hope but some here this morning are losing hope. They feel it slipping away. It's not hopeless yet but it's inching closer. I pray that this message will begin to turn that around. That you may abound in hope.

1. Knowledge of the Bible brings hope.

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.

“Except for the Psalms and some a few exciting stories here and there, the Old Testament is pretty dry.” You may not hear that expressed out loud but most Christians believe it. Do you know how I know they believe it? Because they show it by their actions-or rather their inaction. If you almost never read the Old Testament, you must believe that it is not worth your time. Most Christians rarely read the New Testament, let alone the Old Testament.

But this verse tells us that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.” The “whatever was written” means the entire Old Testament. ‘Whatever’ means *all*. All of it was given for our instruction. This is similar to the warning and encouragement given in 1 Corinthians 10.

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

The New Testament writers tell us that we must read and understand the Old Testament. It's absolutely vital that we do. When was the last time you read through the Old Testament? Have you ever read through the Old Testament? There are Bible reading plans on the wall in the foyer. You can download any number of them on your phone. We do not fail for lack of resources. We fail for lack of commitment and desire.

A regular discipline of reading the Bible will not miraculously solve your problems but I can guarantee you this. If you *don't* feast on God's word, you will hunger for things like hope. We must not look at spiritual disciplines as some kind of magical potion. It's not exactly like exercise. If you get 20-30 minutes of good cardio per day, we know this is good for our heart. It's good for us in many ways. Twenty minutes of reading the Bible every day may not completely take away your depression and hopelessness. It may not cause you to suddenly defeat all of the sin in your life. But if you are not regularly feasting on God's Word, then I can guarantee you that your hopelessness and sin will increase. Spiritual disciplines are a means of grace. They are a means to receive grace. Hope fits into that category of grace. Hope is something that the believer is desperate for.

The good news is that hope is not something that is necessarily inherent for the believer. If it were a natural state of being then Paul would have no reason to remind us why we should have hope. I say it is good news in the sense that it normalizes our need for hope. All Christians need hope because fundamentally all Christians lack hope. So when you have periods of growing hopelessness, do not feel that you are alone. Do not think that no one else in this room feels the same way as you do. Do not draw the conclusion that God has forgotten you or that you are a bad Christian. In your own strength, you do lack hope. That's the way God designed it. Hope is something that needs to come from outside of each of us.

So we need instruction from all of God's word. However, instruction and knowledge by itself is not enough. If that were true, than anyone who ever read the Bible would be good to go. We have to understand and learn from the Old Testament. We need to do what even the characters in the Old Testament were not able to do. They witnessed God's miracles first hand yet still turned away to their own pleasures. We need to read *and* believe. We need to read and heed what it says. We need to be reminded again and again of God's faithfulness throughout all of human history and then act as if God is perfectly and infinitely faithful.

2. Experience with the “God of endurance and encouragement” (5-6) and “hope” (13)

We can do this because God is a God of endurance, encouragement and hope. Is God a God of power? Yes he is. Is God a God of love? Indeed. We regularly see God as a God of love and power but we don't often see him as a God of endurance, encouragement and hope. The word encouragement is the same title given to the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter. That is his essence. His very being is one of encouragement and comfort.

3. The gospel is the story of hope.

This is the main reason to read all of the Bible—in order to see the gospel all over its pages. If you read the creation story and don't see the gospel, you've missed the centerpiece. If you read about Noah and his ark and fail to see the gospel there, you need to read it again. If you take in the tower of Babel story and never even realize that it drips with the gospel message, then we need to have a talk. And that's just the first eleven chapters of Genesis. I haven't even mentioned Abraham, the father of all who believe and therefore also a father of sorts of the gospel. On and on throughout the Old Testament the gospel appears again and again.

The stories are great, aren't they? I just recently started reading through the Bible again for about the ninth time. I always have to force myself not to read 1 and 2 Samuel right away. The David story draws me in every time I read it. The stories are great. Who doesn't love sword fights, battle strategy and love stories. The Scriptures have all of these in abundance. It is an anthology of the greatest literature ever written. But far too many Christians only see these stories as morality plays. [Listen to Matt Chandler](#) explain the difference between a nice story and the gospel.

So you begin to see the difference between reading the Bible to glean bits and pieces instead of reading the Bible to see the gospel on every page. It's not just that each story is a story of hope but that the whole Bible is a story of hope. The Scriptures keep telling the same story of hope again and again, even if it is not always the whole story all at once.

This is what Paul did for us in Romans 15. Remember, he's talking about hope. The bookends of this passage are hope.

4-That...we might have hope
13-So that...you may abound in hope

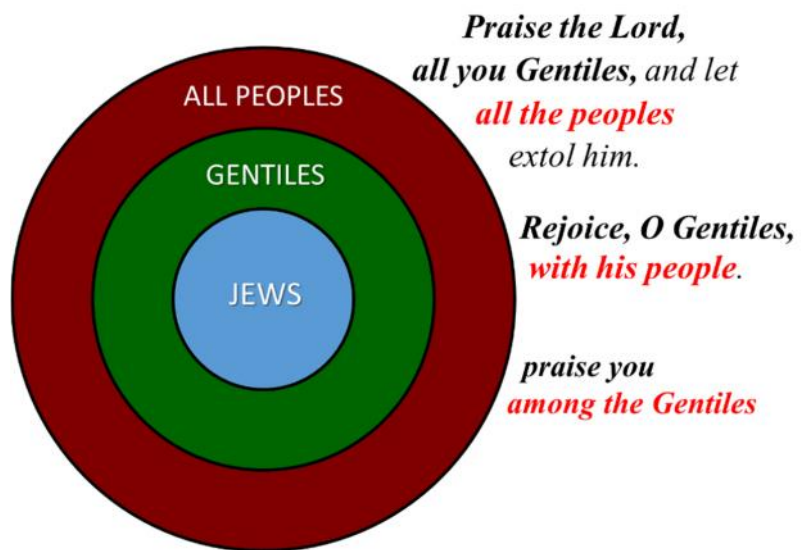
Then what does he put in the middle of these two bookends? Some will say, "Well it seems like he just quoted a bunch of Old Testament verses that don't even seem to go together." Let me show how Paul tied the gospel together.

First he quoted from Psalm 18 "*Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.*" The key word here is among the Gentiles. The Jews were God's chosen people. We can rightly say that the gospel was given to the Jews first. There is a Biblical priority. We know that God chose Abraham so that through him, all nations would be blessed. We see it described in the Old Testament and explained in the New.

1. Jesus was a Jew. At Jesus' birth, God became a Jewish person. He wasn't German or Norwegian or African or Asian. Jesus was a Jew. That's a very significant priority.
2. Salvation is from the Jews. In John 4.22 Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." So Jesus himself said
3. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Jews first on the day of Pentecost.
4. Paul went to the Jews first. All of the first church planters and missionaries were Jews. Even after the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul's priority was still "to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

So in the Old Testament, the Jews praised God among the Gentiles. The Gentiles did not yet know God. The Jews lived among the Gentiles and worshipped God in their midst, in part, to introduce the Gentiles to their Savior. When we worship the Lord in humility and integrity, do you think those around us notice? By worship I don't mean what we do on Sunday morning but how we act the other six days of the week.

Then we see the next progression when Paul quoted from Deut. 32. **10** *And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."* (Deut. 32:43). Did you notice the progression? First the Jews praised God among the Gentiles and now they are praising God with the Gentiles. And the call to rejoice



is directed at the Gentiles. So we see here the spread of the gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles. And that is exactly how it happened, isn't it?

The next step in progression comes when Paul quoted Psalm 117. *11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."* (Psalm 117:1) Now the Gentiles are taking the gospel to other Gentiles. This is the completion of the progress of the gospel. The Jews worshipped among the Gentiles, then with the Gentiles and then all nations. Per capita, do you know what the number one missionary sending nation is today? The country at the top of the list is Palestine.¹

Therefore, the message and the spread of the gospel is at the center of all hope.

4. Hope is when Jesus rules over you.

Finally, Paul quoted from Isaiah 11. *"The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; (Isaiah 11:10) in him will the Gentiles hope."* Love him or hate him, I cannot imagine being ruled by Donald Trump. In most circumstances, being ruled over by another person does not sound like a good thing, and in most cases it probably isn't it. But there is nothing sweeter than to be ruled over by the Lord Jesus.

Paul wrote, "In him will the Gentiles hope." They hope in Jesus because Christ rules over them. Not just because Christ rules over them, but because he rules as Savior and Lord. His is a benevolent rulership. And one way to guarantee a lack of hope in your life is to remove yourself from his rule in your life. When you knowingly sin and turn your back on God's holiness, you have just removed yourself from Christ's rulership. He is the God of endurance, encouragement and hope and you have just told him that he is not necessary. When you battle through daily life but rarely read and study the Scriptures, you have just declared yourself to be self-sufficient. You obviously don't need God. If you really needed him you would seek him. Why do we do these things? We all need hope and some of us are desperate for it, so why do try to find it in ourselves? There is no hope outside of the God of hope, outside of his word and outside of his rulership. If you have lost or are losing hope, this is what and who you need.

Rich Maurer
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¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/july/missionaries-countries-sent-received-csgc-gordon-conwell.html>