

**+ Romans 15:4-13 + How Do You Prepare for His Coming? +
+ 2nd Sunday of Advent + 6 December 2015 +**

How do you prepare for Christmas? In spite of our lack of snow and cold, there are plenty of preparations going on right now. Have your decorations and lights come out? Have you decided where to put the Christmas tree and then realized what has to get moved and cleaned before the tree can find its home and the decorations can come out? Have you shopped for gifts yet or started meal planning or travel planning so you know where to go when? Just today the kids of our Sunday School started preparing for the Christmas Eve service with the choir planning to start after worship.

There's a lot of hustle and bustle with all of our preparations going on right now, but one item you could probably do without is waiting. Few of us like to wait when we have so much to prepare. Who likes to stand in a long line at the store—even though it's been over a week since Black Friday? Who likes to wait on hold with customer service to get a single question answered? Who likes to wait while you creep through busy traffic when it seems like everyone is going home from work or going shopping at the same time? It's hard to wait this time of year with so much to prepare and do.

Yet as much as we may not like waiting and preparing, you and I still have to do it. You see, a King is coming—not some ordinary, earthly king, but One who came once before in lowliness and humility to rescue us and all people. This King is going to come back in glory to judge all people living and dead, but there's one problem. We don't know when he will come again. At least with Christmas preparations, you know that they usually come to an end by December 26 or January 1 at the latest. Not knowing when the King will come back means we have to wait and we have to be prepared lest he find us unready for his return.

So how do you prepare for the King of kings when you don't know when he will return? I suppose you could try to get your life and family and household in order. You could make sure everything is all just so as you try to do the right thing and try to give the best impression, but what typically happens when you prepare for a guest to arrive and their arrival is delayed? If you have or had kids, they start to get bored and start to burn off some of that idle energy. Before you know it, something gets messed up or broken or someone gets hurt. If you've worked hard to prepare a meal, the meat in the oven starts getting dry, the sides get cold, and if you have to heat them up, they get mushy. Then you start getting frustrated. Soon everyone is on edge and things go downhill from there.

Now imagine if it were only up to you to prepare for the coming of the King of kings. He's coming in glory and power to judge the living and the dead, but you don't know when he's coming. How long could you do the right thing before your sinful nature starts getting bored and impatient? How long before you'd rather impatiently move on to something or someone more interesting who has your attention right now? How long before your well-intended preparations start getting dry and cold mushy leaving you frustrated and ready to give up on preparing at all?

If it were up to just you and me, our Advent preparations for Christ's coming would go as well as an overcooked meal in a room full of screaming kids and sarcastic adults. So how can you possibly prepare for the coming King?

Well, the Apostle Paul is here to serve as our Advent preparation assistant this morning, but keep in mind that what he has for us in Romans 15 is more than just a "How-To" guide for proper, patient Advent preparations. In fact, it's not so much what we do, but what the coming King does within us.

Now if there was ever a group of people who understood patiently preparing for Christ's coming, it was God's Old Testament believers. Paul had once been one of those. He had eagerly looked forward to the coming of the Messiah—God's Anointed One chosen to save his people from their sins. Those who faithfully studied the Old Testament knew all the promises about this coming Savior-King. They just didn't know when he would come. That waiting became difficult as those faithful believers faced persecution for their faith and troubles and hardships in their personal lives. Four centuries of silent waiting after the prophet Malachi (whom we heard earlier) made that need to continually and patiently prepare even more difficult.

So how did they prepare for Christ's coming? They continually went back to God's promises in his Word. ***“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*** They prepared with endurance. This wasn't some endurance contest to see who could keep God's Law the longest. No, this was true patience and perseverance

holding out in the face of tremendous adversity and difficulty for their faith, for their families, for their souls, but how could they do it? They were able to endure **“through the encouragement of the Scriptures...”**

You see, your will, no matter how strong or stubborn, will eventually break if left to itself. Your sinful nature and temptation will do their best to undermine how firmly and strongly you stand unless you are emboldened or strengthened or lifted up by another. For God’s Old Testament people, that renewed boldness, that consolation that revived their spirits in the darkest of times came from Holy Scripture and therefore from God himself.

So how can you endure until the King’s coming? It starts with God’s encouragement through Holy Scripture. Paul tells us, **“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us...”** What is written in Scripture was written to teach us **“that we might have hope...”**

Now we talk a lot about hope. We toss that word around so much that it’s often nothing more than a wish. When you tell someone, “I hope things get better,” you honestly desire that something will happen, but you can’t be sure. “I hope the weather stays nice.” “I hope I ace this test.” “I hope I get over my cold.” “I hope...I hope...and I wonder if it will ever happen.”

Yet is any of that really hope? Can any of us really be confident about the future? Left to ourselves, the answer is no. We can’t see the future, but when the Lord speaks about hope in his Word, it’s different. When the Lord gives us hope, he bases it on accomplished fact. With God, there is no uncertainty.

Paul shows us what that means with specific examples how God proved that the coming King would bring joy and peace and mercy to the nations. He cites King David, who rejoiced at God’s victory over his enemies, **“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.”** (Psalm 18:49) He recalls the parting words of the prophet Moses, who had led his people to the Promised Land, **“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”** (Deuteronomy 32:43) He sings the ancient hymn of Psalm 117(:1), **“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples”**, and he points back to Isaiah’s beautiful promise of the Savior to come. **“The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.”** (11:10)

...But what’s Paul’s point? How does any of that help us prepare for our coming King? We have the advantage of knowing that those promises were fulfilled. Though Paul quotes just a handful of passages from the Old Testament, he demonstrates the reason for the hope that we have, hope based on the fact that our King really did accomplish what he set out to do.

Paul explains **“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 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.”** Because Christ is our Savior-King, you can have real hope as you prepare for his coming and that hope enables you to endure no matter what you face.

That hope and endurance that come from our God through Holy Scripture also enable us to enjoy something very rare in our world today. Paul encourages, **“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”**

True unity is rare in our culture today. You don’t have to go too far before you see how polarized people really are, how quick we are to stand on one side against others typically over preferences and opinions. That was a problem for the Roman believers too. They came from two different cultures. The Jews had spent their lives following the old kosher laws regarding what they ate. The Gentiles had spent their lives eating food that was revolting to the Jews. Their differences didn’t just threaten their unity. Those differences threatened their hope in Christ and left them all woefully unprepared for his coming.

So how does Paul deal with this? He calls us to repent—to turn from our eagerness to oppose each other and from our foolish hostility towards each other, then to see others no matter who they are as blood-bought souls for whom Christ died. He points us back to the Scriptures, through which Christ forgives us and unites us.

Paul urges us to have **“a spirit of unity...so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** That doesn’t mean we will always agree on differences of taste or preference or style. Even so, that should not prevent us from being united as a family of God in our common devotion to our Savior-King.

Such ***“a spirit of unity”*** means that in humble Christ-like love, we can agree to disagree where it does not contradict Holy Scripture, because we are united through Christ our Savior-King. Now if the source of contention contradicts Holy Scripture, then we must stand against it. Nevertheless, we don't burn each other down because he doesn't prefer what I like or I don't prefer what she likes. Satan loves to destroy the unity we have with fellow believers over differences of opinion and preference, because by doing so he can rob us of hope and leave us unprepared. Yet he cannot contend with us when we recall how Jesus accepted us when we were unacceptable. With that in mind, we can humbly stand firm together against Satan's attacks as we ***“follow Christ Jesus”*** and prepare for his return.

Patently preparing for Christ's coming isn't easy, but we can do so because our Savior-King gladly encourages us through his Word to endure. By faith he unites us and gives us real hope in him. Now ***“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.”*** Amen.