

Use the Inspired Scriptures to Rejoice in Hope

by John Piper

The Bible is essential in awakening and sustaining hope, and every line of the Old Testament is written to give us hope.

Duration: 45:31

Scripture: Romans 12:12, Romans 15:1-4

Topics: "Biblical Hope", "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not judging or mistreating others based on their different beliefs or customs. He encourages the congregation to prioritize their identity as children of God and to bear reproaches with grace. The preacher quotes from Psalm 69 and highlights the significance of considering the needs of others before our own. He urges the listeners to immerse themselves in the Bible, seeking to understand and savor the glory of God, which will lead to a rock-solid hope and enduring joy. The sermon concludes with a call to give generously and serve others, finding hope in the promises of the Bible even in the midst of suffering.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org. Tonight's scripture text is found in the book of Romans, chapter 15, verses 1 through 4. And we will also look at chapter 12, verse 12. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. For whatever was written in former days was written for your instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

And now Romans 12, verse 12. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Before I pray, I want to make you aware of this Bible reading plan.

This message is about the scriptures, and this is one way to do it this year. You read in four different places every day of the year, except for the last five days of the month when you catch up what you missed for the first 25 days. It's just a genius of a plan for procrastinating people, which is everybody.

I started this morning. I read through the Bible for 15 years this way, at least. I read this morning from Genesis 1, Psalm 1, Matthew 1, and Acts 1. And I'll tell you, the effect that has on me is incredible.

The whole stage is set as God creates the universe and he creates me in his own image. Psalm 1 says that he's written the whole book in order to make me like a tree that's sunk down so that I'll prosper in what I do. Matthew 1, Jesus is the son of David with all that genealogy, which shows, very interestingly, that he was born of some pretty seamy relationships.

Rahab is mentioned, and Bathsheba is mentioned. I mean, there's a lot going on there in Matthew 1. And then you get to Acts 1, where the Holy Spirit is falling, and the angel is saying, just as you saw him go, he's going to come again in four places of the Bible. That took about 20 minutes to read.

From creation to redemption happens. It doesn't work that way every time you read in four different places. Some people say it's like reading the Bible chaotically.

Well, for me, this Bible all hangs together. And I love to see four different places at once every morning. So that's the end of my little promotion of this way of reading the Bible in 2005.

If this doesn't work for you, find your way and be in the Scriptures. Let's pray. Oh God, we want you to be our vision.

Please come in power. Take the Bible and make it precious to us. Illumine the eyes of our hearts to discern what is the Word of God, the Scriptures.

So that there is a deep witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives, confirming from the Word and from the inside out, here God has spoken. Oh, be our firm foundation, God, in and through your Word, I pray. Help me now to be faithful to the Scriptures, to exalt over the Scriptures and to exposit the Scriptures such a way that the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures would be pleased to come now and apply the Scriptures to the hearts of your people, oh God.

Begin this year with us in your Word and give us a heart for your Word. Incline us to your testimonies, oh God, I pray in Jesus' name, amen. So there's a parallel now between this message and the message from last time.

And the parallel goes like this. We're asking about how you fight for joy. And the reason we're talking about that is because Romans 12, 12.

Romans 12, 12, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. So that phrase, rejoice in hope, has gripped me in these last several times together. And I'm asking, okay, how does this work? How does the Christian life work? And you remember, I'll sum it up for you from the last two times we were together.

Affliction is normal. Christ has broken into our affliction and carried our sorrows and our sins into the grave, left them there, came out triumphant, defeated the devil, defeated sin, defeated all the evils of our lives, is reigning in heaven today. Therefore, we have hope in, not instead of, suffering.

And this hope is the root of joy. And this joy is the power of endurance. And endurance is the means of the sacrifices of love.

That's the Christian life, I think, and the way God has anointed for it to work. Blood-bought, Christ-exalting hope leads to indomitable, unshakeable joy, even in tribulation, leads to patient endurance, leads to the sacrifices of love, which men see and give glory to our Father in heaven. That's the way it works.

And so the question emerged, so how do you nurture, how do you awaken, how do you sustain hope in a world like this? And our first answer was prayer. From last time, Ephesians 1.18, Paul is praying, he's praying. I pray that you may know what is the hope to which you've been called.

Now, that's not just a prayer about information. He's talking to believers. We get saved by hope.

We know what our hope is, right? Well, sort of. You can tell me the facts, as a Christian, that are the foundation of your hope. But I'm asking, do we feel it when we get up in the morning? Do you feel it at noon? Do you feel it late at night? Do you feel it when you pray about God and somebody gets on your case in view of Indian Ocean calamities? Do you feel hope? That's the issue.

The issue here is not what's the foundation of hope. Christ, that's given. He's there like a rock.

We're the problem. So the question I'm asking is, how do you awaken and sustain living hope, lively hope, felt hope, joy-producing hope? That's the question. And our first answer was prayer.

And Paul says, I pray that you might know the hope to which you've been called, and the riches of His glorious inheritance, and the power at work in you. He's praying for our experience of riches. I feel it is rich.

I taste it is rich. I look at all the world has to offer, and I say, rubble. And I turn over here to Jesus, and I say, treasure.

And you mean it. That's what you pray for. So if you don't feel hope in this room, ask that God would open your eyes to see the magnificence of your hope.

That's what prayer is for. That was answer number one. Now today, answer number two is the Bible.

Prayer and the Word. Prayer and the Word. These two things, I think, are the main means of grace in the Bible.

Reading, meditating on, and memorizing Scripture. And I want to be careful with reading, because I know that there are cultures that are pre-reading, pre-literate. And I wouldn't want to elevate the necessity of reading beyond what is true.

So you can be read to, or spoken to, or hear a tape of the Scriptures, and meditate, and memorize, and fulfill those three things. So don't push me when I say reading is essential. I mean, ordinarily, that's, in our culture, what we must do in order to get it into our heads.

That's not true in every culture, though we hope it will be, and pray that it will happen. So prayer and the Word are the two means of grace. Now here's my question in this message.

What do I see in the Scriptures that tell me, that make plain how essential the Bible is in wakening and sustaining hope? Where do I get that? I see it implicitly here in Romans 12. So let's go there first. And then I see it explicitly in Romans 15.

So we'll go there second. What I mean by implicit is this. Paul is writing, never neglect the obvious.

He's writing Scripture as an apostle, an anointed, called, authorized apostle of the living Christ, providing foundation for the church in what he's writing. Add to that, in his writing Scripture, he quotes Scripture in order to, I believe, make really clear that the whole Bible, what he writes and what has been written, are one. It's not like I'm nullifying that or that makes this unnecessary.

But as I write Scripture, I quote Scripture. Now, let's see an example of it. Just drop your eyes down from verse 12 to verse 19, and we'll see one of the ways that Paul implicitly shows that Scripture produces hope, which produces love through joy and endurance.

Verse 19, Beloved, never avenge yourselves. Now, I'm assuming with you, and I can argue for this, that that's an instruction about the nature of love. Somebody hits you, turn the other cheek.

That's the loving thing to do. Somebody says a negative thing about you, wife, colleague, neighbor, a loving thing to do is not to think, I'll get the last word, I'll show her, I'll show him, I'll. Beloved, never avenge yourselves.

Leave it to the wrath of God. Now, here comes the Scripture. For it is written.

He says that 16 times in this book. It is written. And then he quotes Scripture.

Deuteronomy 32, 35. Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

Interesting. Profound. His goal for us is to be a loving people.

We've seen that. Verse 9 following, Let love be genuine. Everything is about loving each other and loving the world the way we ought to love.

Now, to buttress this particular way of loving, namely, don't return evil for evil, or don't avenge yourselves. He says the Bible says something. The Bible says something.

He could have just said, I'm telling you, I'm the apostle. Do what I say, which he does sometimes. But here he says, the Bible, the first part of the Bible, and I'm finishing the Bible.

The first part of the Bible says. And he quotes God. Vengeance is mine.

I'll repay. What is that? The way that works is this. You don't have to bear that burden.

You don't have to be God. You don't have to settle justice issues in your personal relations. You don't have to sue that person.

Got a great phone call this week from a woman whose husband died three months ago. Through total mistake in the blood work. 34 years old, three kids, and they misread his blood.

Dead in 24 hours. Bacteria didn't catch. The doctor wept in her arms and acknowledged the mistake.

And she called weeks ago to make the appointment to talk about suing. And when I took the call, she said, I just want to thank you and say hi and appreciate your ministry, because I've decided I'm not going to do that. We've got lots of stories in this church like that.

Hope comes from saying, all right, God, I've been wronged. I've been really wrong. I was abused as a child.

I get abused at work. They blew it at the hospital. I've been wronged.

This isn't right. And not have to be God and say all wrongs will be made right someday. I can lay it down without compromising the justice of the universe.

God's going to settle it someday. That's a wonderfully freeing thing. It enables you to love people.

It really does. You don't have to get back at people. You can return good for evil.

You can be freed by the hope of judgment. Justice will hold sway in this world. Relax.

You don't have to get the last word. God will get the last word. Have you ever thought this amazing thought that everyone who sins against you will get their just punishment either if they repent and believe in Jesus on the cross or if they don't repent and believe in Jesus in hell.

And you don't want to belittle the cross by adding to the punishment that Christ took for them there. And you don't want to say God doesn't know how to deal with evils in hell by dealing with them here. You don't need to be God.

You're free to love people indiscriminately. And when you are wronged, you're free to return good for evil. And all of that flows from the Bible says, Vengeance is mine.

I will repay, says the Lord. Got to know your Bible if you want to love people. That's the implicit use of scripture here.

So what I'm looking for, I'm looking for evidences in the Apostle Paul that he really believes the Bible is necessary to be a hopeful, joyful, persevering, loving God, glorifying person. And there's my argument that implicitly that's the way Romans 12, 19 works. If you're going to be freed from vengeance, you have to read your Bible and know that God promises vengeance on those who don't repent so that either Christ bears their punishment or hell and they bear their punishment.

And you don't have to add to it. Now, let's go to the explicit argument. Go to chapter 15 with me.

I want to see Paul explicitly say what I'm arguing, namely, that the Bible is an essential means of awakening and sustaining hope, which awakens and sustains joy, which awakens and sustains endurance, which awakens and sustains love, which gives God glory. I really want to know whether or not Paul teaches, doesn't just implicitly imply, but teaches that about scripture. That's what I'm after here.

And I think we found it. Let's start reading at verse 2, Romans 15. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

Now stop there and just get the context. Chapter 14 and chapter 15 has all been dealing with how to help this church in Rome love each other when there's some differences on whether to eat a certain thing or whether to drink a certain thing and what to do on Sunday. That's the issue.

You've got meat, you've got wine, you've got Sabbath keeping in these chapters. He's trying to get this church in unity, even though they've got disagreements and the disagreements aren't going away. He

says, let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind.

That's the way he's settling these issues. And he wants love to abound among the arguments that are going back and forth and people getting bent out of shape about what others do on Sunday and where they drink this and where they eat this. And he's saying, let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind on these issues.

We're not going to the shed. Love is going to abound here. That's what's going on here in verse two.

Please your neighbor for his good. And then something absolutely astonishing happens. I think I was astonished.

What's not astonishing is that he would reach for Jesus as an illustration of that. Don't please yourself, please others. I mean, that's who Jesus was.

He died for us. He died for us. He chose pain to bless us.

I'll take your pain. I'll take your death. I'll take your condemnation.

I'll take your sin. I'll take your guilt. Let me have it.

That's Jesus. That's not a surprise that he would say, live a gospel life. Look at Jesus.

That's not a surprise. What is a surprise is where he gets his illustration of Jesus. Let's read verse three.

Four, I want you to live this way. Treat each other with love. Four, Christ did not please himself, but as it is written.

And then he quotes Psalm 69.9. This is really strange. I mean, you know the stories about Jesus. Why don't you talk about the foot washing? Why don't you talk about touching a leper? Why don't you talk about the way he loved Peter through the denial? I mean, give us an illustration.

Why you quote in the Bible written a thousand years before Jesus. Isn't that strange? I mean, he's using Jesus as an example of love. And he reaches back a thousand years for a verse about Jesus.

That's really strange. I think I wouldn't do it that way. Unless, unless in the middle of the flow of this love exhortation.

I really wanted to say something about the Bible. Which he does. Read verse three again.

As it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. There are two things going on here. There's the substance and there's the form.

The substance is he took your reproach. He took your reproach. He's the Christ.

Fulfilling all Old Testament prophecy. And he took your reproach. Don't return evil for evil.

Don't hit people upside the face. Because they've got some different mores than you do. Come on, we're king's children.

Get your priorities right. He bore your reproaches. Can you bear some reproaches? That's the gist here.

The gospel is being applied. That's the substance. The form is this is a quotation from the Bible.

Now, you might think, well, why are you making a point out of that? Because maybe that isn't what he's into. Maybe he's just on the substance. And you should just not make such a big deal out of the fact that he's quoting scripture.

And I would say amen to that. I wouldn't make a big deal out of it, except that he does. Now we go to verse four.

So he quotes Psalm 69, trying to get us to please our neighbors in instead of ourselves. And now he says four. And you see the word for that.

That's a very if you don't have the word for there in your Bible, get a new Bible. Because that's really important. Because he's now giving a reason for why he just quoted scripture to illustrate the life of Jesus to promote love for.

Whatever was written in former days. I don't miss that word. Whatever.

That's incredible. That's mind boggling. The whole Old Testament.

That's what he means. Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through the endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. And I've got what I need.

That's what I'm after. Now, feel the strangeness of this with me so that the force lands on you. He's writing chapter 14 starts chapter 15 about practical nitty gritty issues in the church.

Some are weak. Some are strong. They can be out of shape with each other.

There's some disunity. He's pleading with them to get their priorities right. Not make a big federal case out of little things.

Come on, please, rather than seek to be pleased. And then he reaches for the biggest gun possible. Jesus, substitutionary atonement.

He bore your reproach. Only he does it by reaching back to scripture. And then he pauses and talks about the whole Old Testament.

I mean, that's incredible to me. Something's going on here. Really, really significant that Paul would pause not only to reach back to the Old Testament to get his little information about Jesus substitutionary life, but that he would stop right there and say, now you wonder why I did that.

I mean, I can't think why else he would pause. I mean, this is interrupting the flow. He's got us way off the topic here.

He's got us on the doctrine of scripture. And we were on love and how to get along in the church. And he's now reached back and he's got himself.

Now, you're all wondering why I quoted Psalm 69, 9, aren't you? And if you weren't, you should be. Because now Paul says, I'll tell you why. You think that's a little out of the way, strange verse from an imprecatory psalm full of judgments? Guess what? Every sentence of that book is written to give you

hope.

And without hope, you can't love each other. I just think that's amazing. You want to read the Bible this year? I want to read the Bible.

I want the Bible so bad in my heart and in my mind because I want hope. I want hope for treasuring Christ together. I want hope for my children, my grandchildren.

I want hope for the Indian Ocean. I want hope for America. I want hope.

I want to be a man filled with hope, indomitable in joy no matter who dies or who lives. I want to endure. I want to love people.

I've got to have my Bible. How do you live without your Bible? Meditating, memorizing, savoring it. And here you have it.

Just don't, don't. I think verse 4 of Romans 15 is one of the most important verses in the Bible about the function of the Bible in your life. Do you feel the sweeping nature of this verse? Whatever was written from Genesis to Malachi, whatever was written was written for your instruction in order that through endurance and through the exhortation or encouragement of the Scriptures, you'd have a hope.

Every line of the Old Testament is to give you hope. Now if that's not working for you, pray. Now we get the two weeks together.

Pray that God would open your eyes to what's hopeful about the genealogies in Deuteronomy and 2 Chronicles. Oh my, that's hope? Yes. If you understood why they're there, why there are nine chapters of chronology and genealogy in the 2 Chronicles, you'd feel more hope.

So poke around in a Bible dictionary. Get a good commentary and say, okay, what's the hope issue here? Because that's the litmus test for whether you're getting it. According to Romans 15.4, if it's not feeding hope, you're missing it.

It's not the Bible's problem, it's your problem. And oh, that we would be a people who see and savor hope-giving promises in the Bible. Now I'm going to try to apply this to the situation we find ourselves in these days.

Everybody, everybody has been absolutely captivated by this horrific event in the Indian Ocean called this tsunami. Works both ways. We need hope.

We need the Bible to be constantly feeding our hope in Christ when we are surrounded by exquisite pleasures and when we're surrounded by exquisite suffering. I'm not sure which is more dangerous. I'm pretty sure pleasures are more dangerous to faith than suffering.

So I will say, I'm not going to linger on it, because that's not where we are right now in the world. And rarely are we there in the world. Pleasures are very dangerous, not because they hurt and make you cry, but because they woo you away from Christ and make you consider them your hope.

So what money can buy as your hope or what your career can provide you as your hope or what your wife can provide you is your hope or whatever. But here's the issue now, namely when there's a catastrophe of this magnitude, what do we do for hope? Our grief in these days has been doubled, mine anyway. It's hard

to cry about statistics, right? So you have to go to the stories.

You have to go read the stories. And I do that. I don't want my heart to be hard.

And it would be. It would be. I just 100,000, 150,000, 400,000, no tears from numbers.

But you read about a mom with two kids and she grabs the little one-year-old, tries to grab the five-year-old. They're swept through a jungle gym. She grabs on with one arm, can hold the baby barely.

And the little five-year-old is swept away. That's real easy to bring me to tears because I got kids. You got to get into the hundreds of thousands of moments of people's lives in order to feel the horror of what happened.

And so that's one dimension of grief. If you don't feel it, you should work at it because not to weep with those who weep is a sin, according to verse 18 of Romans 12. However, there's another grief that I have felt, and I have to battle with this one too because I tend to get angry about this one rather than feeling grief for those who cause it.

And it has to do with those who are saying so many wrong things about God in the Washington Post and the New York Times and on talk radio shows. It happens every time there's a calamity, but it's fresh grief for me every time. Here's an example.

Wall Street Journal, December 31st. No Christian, this is a purported Christian theologian writing, and I regard this sentence as almost blasphemy. No Christian is licensed to utter odious banalities about God's inscrutable counsels or blasphemous suggestions that all this mysteriously serves God's good ends, end quote.

So there's a sweeping statement about what you are licensed to say that any talk about there being counsels of God that are inscrutable in this is odious and banal, and to speak of God's good ends being mysteriously served is blasphemous. So I'm a blasphemer. That's exactly what I believe about this event.

So my question is, has this man read the Bible? Has he read the Bible? And I could quote numerous other quotations where this sort of thing cannot be attributed to the causality of God. And I just want to say, have you read your Bible? For example, do we believe and reverence the God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in one stroke, men, women and children with fire and brimstone in an afternoon, two whole cities burned to death? Or do we just say, that's an interesting story? Do we feel, do we believe the Bible? Or do we believe and reverence the God of the Exodus, Exodus 13, 15, the final plague on Egypt, quote, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, all of them. Do you believe it? I mean, where does this man get his authority? Or Deuteronomy 32, 39, those people back then, we tend to think new is better and modern is more intelligent.

Way wrong, because the people of the Bible knew some things that we are just catching up to. Deuteronomy 32, 39, thus says the Lord, see now that I, even I am he and there is no God beside me. I kill and I make alive.

I wound and I heal. There is none that can deliver out of my hand. Shall we not trust and reverence the God of Joshua? Joshua 10, 11, the Ammonites, the Amorites gathered against Israel, it says, and quote, the Lord threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Isaac and they died.

There were more who died of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword. We reverence this God. We say that doesn't exist.

That can't happen in the world. Maybe then, not now. What authority do people have? Shall we not fear and reverence the God of David? Second Samuel 12, 15, he commits adultery with Bathsheba.

She becomes pregnant. She has a baby. And it says the Lord afflicted the child and he became sick and died.

Son, here's a fact that we've just got to get into our heads. It's a Bible fact. God owns you and he can do with you as he pleases.

You don't deserve life. If God takes your life, he takes nothing wrongfully. Every death is God's right.

He owns your life. All life is a gift on loan from God. He may take it at any moment and does you no wrong.

Let's just get that into our heads. No death is a wrongful death in God's eyes. You are his.

He may do with you as he pleases. What about the prophets? Amos 4, 10, God reminds Israel what they have done and what he has done. I sent among you a pestilence after the manor of Egypt.

I killed your young men with the sword. I carried away your horses. I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils.

Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. Or in that same time, Isaiah 37, 36, Sennacherib. I chose this one because of the number.

Sennacherib's army of the Assyrians comes against Jerusalem. They cry out, Hezekiah, oh God, save us. And then it says, the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.

And when the people rose in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. 185,000 people God killed in one night. It's explicit in the Bible.

Let's just get rid of our Bibles and cease being Christians or let's bow before this God. That's the issue. Not every time there's some catastrophe in the world with heart-rending pain and suffering.

We're going to call God Almighty into question or say He's on a vacation. Drop the ball. Really can't do anything.

Satan's got the upper hand or whatever. We're just not going to go there at Bethlehem. We're going to tremble and fall before the living God of the Bible.

One last illustration. Revelation. I mean, has anybody read Revelation recently? Revelation 16, 9. These are things that are coming upon the world.

They were scorched by the fierce heat and they cursed the name of God who had the power over these plagues and they did not repent and give him glory. They're already sunbathing topless at Phuket, Thailand, amid the rubble. Expect another wave.

I mean, you read these stories. So if you were to ask me right now, so you're saying this is the judgment of God. I'm saying mercy and judgment always mingle in natural catastrophes.

Mercy and judgment always mingle in natural catastrophes. God is always in charge and He's always doing a billion, billion wise things that no one can see but Him and we should bow. But I'll tell you, I have read some stories of what was going on when the wave hit that make me not wonder why it hit.

And it should come again in this city too. And it will. I mean, we're going to wake up one morning to the news that the bottom third of India is underwater.

That's coming. Can you handle that? That the first 10 miles of the shore of the Atlantic Ocean are underwater? Read your Bible. Now, the whole point of that little reference to the catastrophe was to say, when I try to get my bearings in a world like this that feels like it's just about to come apart, and you see those are the headlines, rotation of the earth compromised.

When I try to get my bearings in a world like this, I get help from this list of texts. Isn't that odd? It's paradoxical. I mean, I get help.

My feet feel like they're on ground. I'm not being swept away when I said, I've seen all this. I've been bowing before this God for 52 years or I'm a fake.

Should I stop bowing today? The God of the Old Testament, the God of Christ, the God of revelation? No, my hope is in God, His wisdom, His justice, His mingling of mercy and justice. One day, judgment is going to come upon this earth with such cataclysmic force. It will make that tsunami look like a whirlpool in a bathtub.

Now, I don't think that believing that means you don't have compassion, that your heart doesn't break, that you don't give your money. In fact, let me close this way. My plea, Sunday morning and Saturday night, my plea is, O Bethlehem, give yourself to the Bible first this year, early in the morning for 20 minutes or so, meditating, memorizing.

Then pray that God would open your heart to see and savor the massive glory of God in the Bible. And then get your feet on Christ who loved you and gave Himself for you so that you have a rock-solid hope under your feet. And in that hope, rejoice indomitably in the face of all tribulation.

And in that joy, be persevering and enduring. And in that endurance, lay your lives down in love and give and give and give to these relief efforts. And sign up to go and pour out your heart.

And when you see it face to face, then you'll weep. One of the things God does among the billions of purposes is to break the hearts of His people and set them to loving like Jesus loved. And if that sounds strange to you, we have a very strange God.

He's the most holy and the most healthy and the most sane. And we are very sick and our perspectives are very skewed. And we are so self-aggrandizing and self-protecting and self-exalting and put man as God.

We need to just bathe ourselves morning after morning in the Bible so that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Let's pray. Oh God, I pray that Bethlehem would be a meek, humble, broken-hearted, bold people of the Book.

And that as we read the stories of your sovereign, wise, just, and merciful power in the prophets and in the law and in the writings and in the Gospels and in the revelation, we would bow with our face to the ground

and our hand on our mouth and worship like Job did when you took his kids. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord and he did not sin with his lips.

It's going to be a hard year, Lord. I feel it in my bones. It's going to be a hard year around the world.

Things are going to happen this year we never dreamed. God, make us strong. Get us ready.

Don't make us wimpy Christians by neglecting the whole counsel of God. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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