

“THE ADVENT OF HOPE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: II Thessalonians 2:16-17; Hebrews 6:17-19

Introduction.

The sanctuary looks beautiful. I am especially grateful for the hours of preparation given by Jason and Amy Visser, Jan Bos, Marsha Miller, Kara and Susan, Nancy, and our worship planning team. It is my prayer that God will be glorified in all that we do as we celebrate this season. I look forward to celebrating this season with you.

To start off on the right foot, let's talk about hope and the advent of hope. Hope is a wonderful thing. We are hopeful about a lot of things.

How many of you hope you don't get the flu this season?

How many of you hope the Seahawks win the Super Bowl?

How many of you students hope to do well on your assignments and tests?

How many of you hope you get a raise in the next year?

How many of you hope to lose a little weight, maybe after the holidays?

A farmer plows in hopes of a harvest. A student studies in hopes of good grades. We practice in hopes of playing well. We take medicine in hopes of getting well. We court and date in hopes of getting married. We save in hopes of purchasing something or retiring. We hope we get what we want for Christmas.

This is hope in the *conventional* sense. It's a desire for something good in the future that is uncertain. This is hope as the world knows it and as we all have experienced it. It may not happen, it may be short lived, who knows?

On Thursday I hoped for a great feast with my family. That happened. Yesterday some of you hoped the Cougars would win, but they didn't. I hope the Packers win today, but who knows. I hope my preparation for this sermon about hope will be helpful to someone who is struggling with hope or hopelessness.

In the normal course of the day and week and year, we all think about, talk about and feel this kind of hope in a million different ways, small and large. This is conventional hope.

The hope that the Bible is concerned with is of a completely different sort. It's important that we get this at the outset or we will miss something very important. From the *Biblical* perspective the hope of the world, in the end, is no hope. The reason for this is because the world is without God.

Ephesians 2:12 Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, *having no hope and without God in the world.*

A person who doesn't have Jesus Christ, has no true hope.

Only when you have Jesus does hope become confident hope. This kind of hope is not based on conditions being met or circumstances working out or things falling into place. It doesn't depend on what I have or am able to do for myself, or on what someone else can do for me.

Biblical hope is a whole different animal. Let me give an example. There was absolutely nothing in *Abraham's* situation that justified his hope that Sarah would give birth to a son. Nothing. But because of the promise of God, "in hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told..." (Romans 4:18).

In other words he had what Hebrews 6:11 called the "full assurance of hope." Abraham was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

So when we read that Abraham hoped against hope, it means he had a confident hope rather than a conventional hope. Abraham was too old to have a child, and his wife was barren, but Biblical hope is never based on what is possible with man.

Biblical hope or confident hope not only expects it to happen, it's confident that it will happen. (See Piper, on Hebrews 6:1-12, 4/6/86).

God wants you to be full of hope. God wants you to be encouraged this morning. He has a plan not just show you but convince you of how good and real hope is.

Hebrews 6:17-19 *God desired to show more convincingly* [that] we who have fled for refuge might have *strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.*

God goes the extra mile to show us even more convincingly hope and encouragement. He wants to drive home into our hearts the hopefulness of our future. He wants us not just to know it but to feel it. God's heart is to convince us of His love and to give us even greater faith, hope and encouragement.

That's what Advent is all about. To convince us of our hope. Everything the OT anticipated, longed for and strained to see, appears in the manger. I call it the advent of hope. The promises of God fulfilled.

And notice, not just encouragement but strong encouragement, the kind that stands up under the pressures of life, the expectations of the holidays, and the inner bouts of discouragement, distress, depression, despair and hopelessness. God desires this for you this morning.

In **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17** we read: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and *good hope through grace*, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."

What is good hope? What makes it good?

There are at least six marks or essential characteristics of a good hope:

A good hope has a solid foundation, it's built on Jesus Christ.

It does not rest on good works or wishful thinking or pipe dreams or crossing your fingers or pie in the sky or feelings or opinions or anything on earth. It's based on God in Christ.

In I Timothy Christ is called "our hope" (1:1). In Colossians "Christ in you the hope of glory" (1:27). In Romans "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**" (15:13).

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
On Christ the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. (Edward Mote)

Jesus is the solid rock of your hope. He is the tried and true cornerstone. He alone can bear all the weight that we can lay on Him. "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame" (1 Peter 2:6).

A good hope is drawn from the Scriptures, it gets its content from God's Word.

"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**" (Romans 15:4).

"Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope" (Psalm 119:49).

"My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word" (Psalm 119:81).

"The whole Bible is written to create hope in the hearts of God's people" (Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 122).

What is written here is not just for our heads, it's written for our hearts. A hope that can't find any Scriptures to give it substance and truth isn't a good hope.

The Scriptures give us God's perspective and His perspective will give us hope and endurance especially in hard times.

"We do not lose heart... For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison... We look to the things that are unseen...because the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

God's Word is like kindling for our hope and for the hope of our children. Establish this testimony in your children early and build the fire. This is the well with living water, this is the meal of living bread, this is the light in the darkness.

The eternal Word of God is our eternal comfort and the content of our eternal hope.

A good hope is ours by grace, it is another one of God's great gifts to us.

Jesus has been sent and appointed by God to purchase our hope and to freely offer it and give it to all who ask.

The Ephesians were without God in the world and had no hope. Then Paul came and preached Christ to them. They left their miserable situation, and received good hope through grace.

“Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God.” For he is a God of matchless grace. He elects by grace. He calls by grace. He sanctifies by grace. He sustains faith by grace. He gives us hope by His grace. And He will glorify us by grace. We cannot earn it, deserve it or merit it. It’s free. Believe it. Rest in it. Delight in it. It’s yours” (See Piper, on II Thess. 2:13-17).

Our hope is a good hope because it is ours by the gift of God’s grace.

A good hope is a hope that is felt inwardly in the heart, we can tell it’s there.

This good hope comforts our hearts. If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31). If God did not spare His own Son for us, how much more will He graciously give us? (8:32). Our hearts are comforted that no tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword or anything in life or death will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 38-39).

Yes, our hope may rise and fall, some days being strong and clear, other days being feeble and barely hanging on, but even in this we are comforted and rejoice.

We rejoice in hope even in the midst of sufferings because in our hearts we know that “...suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).

This good hope comforts our hearts that we are saved. Hope produces patience because in the face of every trial we know our hope is sure and certain. Hope is always future, patience is hopes constant companion.

A good hope is a hope that is evident in our outward life; established in every good work and word.

1 John 3:2-3 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And *everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

A living hope makes an obvious difference. Because my hope is in God I don’t need to lie, cheat, steal, try to control everything, be fearful or anxious. I don’t need to try to fix everything and everyone. I don’t need to cut corners or step on someone else to get ahead. Good hope will be evident in the fruit of the Spirit, in charity, kindness, honesty, fairness, humility.

If there is light in the house you will see it through the windows. If there is a good hope in your heart it will be clearly seen in your words and actions.

A good hope is a hope that you will have opportunities to share.

1 Peter 3:15 always be prepared to give an answer to any one who asks them to give a reason for the hope that is in them.

This implies two things. *First*, Christians hope is a *visible* hope. If an unbeliever watches us for a while our hope should show. It should show in peace, joy (Romans 12:12), love (Colossians 1:4-5), boldness (2 Corinthians 3:12) and endurance (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Second, our hope is a *reasonable* hope. It may have looked irrational when Abraham felt strong confidence that he would be the father of many nations even though he was too old and his wife was barren. But it was not irrational! We have a good reason for our hope and we should be ready to share it because others need it (see Piper on II Thess. 2:13-17).

Conclusion:

The testimony of Scripture is that in Christ, by grace, we have a good hope that is sure and certain and can never be exhausted. Christ in us is our hope, our future, our glory. Our confidence is unquenchable. The best is yet to come.

Hebrews 6:18-20 *hold fast to the hope set before us*. 19 We have this as a sure and *steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope* that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.

A ship's anchor holds the ship fast because it is embedded in something firm, solid, even though you can't see it. Our souls are anchored fast in heaven, we can't see it but we know it is certain. It penetrates deep into the invisible place of our eternal, living, good, faithful God. Our ship may be buffeted by waves and assailed by storms, but our anchor is sure, our hope is certain.

My body still gets sick, but I know with certainty that one day my body will be whole and perfect.

My soul still sins, but I know with certainty that one day my soul will be whole and perfect.

Things happen to me here that are unfair, unjust, bad, wrong, painful, frustrating and discouraging, but I know with certainty that one day all will be made right and all will be perfect and good.

We begin Advent with the signs and symbols of our sure and certain and confident hope in Christ. Here on this table are the symbols of our hope anchored in heaven.

Seize the hope and hold fast to the hope set before you by God in Christ. God wants you to be encouraged and strengthened in your hope. He has given this season of Advent and this meal to convince us of how good is this hope He has given to us.

Prayer: God of all true and good hope, by your love and grace fill our hearts with hope this morning and in this season as we anticipate the coming of Christ, our hope and the hope of the nations.