

Hope

Romans 15:4-13

The Second Sunday in Advent, December 10, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

God promised Abraham that from Abraham's descendents God would bring forth a blessing for all of the nations of the earth. This blessing was not for the descendents of Abraham only, but for all the nations of the earth. This blessing that God would bring forth from Abraham's descendents is for you.

God gave Abraham a sign of the promise that God would bring forth a blessing from Abraham's descendents. The sign that God gave to Abraham was circumcision. Circumcision marks the place from which descendents come. Therefore circumcision served as the sign among all of Abraham's descendents that a blessing for all of the nations would come from them.

Jesus is a servant of circumcision. Jesus is a servant of circumcision because He is the descendent of Abraham who brings forth the blessing for all of the nations of the earth. What humanity had thwarted in the beginning by refusing God's interactions with it when God interacted with us as a whole, God has now accomplished through the descendents of one man.

The blessing that Jesus grants to you is the hope of a future.

Now when I use the word hope, I am not using the word hope the way that we English speakers commonly use the word hope. We commonly use the word hope to express a wish or a desire. I hope it snows tomorrow. Or I hope it doesn't snow tomorrow. That expresses a wish or a desire. I am not using the word hope in that fashion. I am not using the word hope in that fashion because God's promises do not use the word hope in that fashion. Rather when I use the word hope I am using the word hope the way that God's word uses the word hope. In God's word hope refers to something to which we look forward because it is guaranteed to us.

This is the same hope that we have for the sun coming up in the morning. It is the same hope that we have that springtime will follow winter. When our parents keep all of their promises to us, it is the same hope that we have when they make a new promise, but have not fulfilled it yet.

Jesus grants you the hope of a future. The future hope that Jesus grants to you is one that according to God's Word is guaranteed to you. It is hope of life in the new heaven and the new earth. It is the hope of resurrection.

Jesus and His apostles describe it in several ways. Jesus often calls it the new age. Jesus calls it the resurrection. The apostles call it those things, but the apostles also call it the new heaven and the new earth. It is a little confusing to me when some of you refer to this future hope with the word "heaven." I am never sure what you mean by that. I get the impression that some of you think that heaven is another world up there somewhere like "Jack and the Beanstalk."

Jesus and His apostles are pretty straightforward about the whole thing. This world will eventually come to an end. When it ends Jesus will return in glory. When He returns He returns for judgment. The current heaven and the current earth will be burned up in the heat of the fire of His judgment. When the judgment is completed He will create a new heaven and a new earth.

The new heaven and the new earth are just like this heaven and this earth with one important difference. In the new heaven and the new earth everything will work the way that God designed it to work in the beginning. When everything works the way that God designed it to work in the beginning there will be no more sin and no more death. You will live in harmony with each other and with the creation the way that God designed you to live with each other and with the creation. You will not die.

Your bodies will function with the harmony with which God desires them to function. That means that no one will get sick. No one will get injured. No one will grow old. Most importantly no one will die.

This is why at the time of judgment Jesus will raise the dead from the dead. That is so that they may live in the new heaven and the new earth and enjoy the blessings of everlasting life that He has promised them.

For those who have already died Jesus promises to preserve their souls until the day of resurrection when they will be returned to their bodies for the final enjoyment of everlasting life. He keeps them in His own presence until He returns again in glory.

This is a hope because it is in the future. It is a hope because it is guaranteed to you. This hope is guaranteed to you despite whatever sins or hardships that you are enduring at this time. No matter what grief you are experiencing, you have this hope. It is God's way of getting you through your suffering and sins to the final salvation that He has prepared for you.

It is this hope that Jesus came the first time to present to you in a preliminary form. In the new heaven and the new earth everything will work the way it should work. Jesus comes the first time many years ago and makes things work the way that they should work. He heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, mobility to the lame, purification to the lepers. He casts out the demons and raises the dead. He does this in a preliminary way so that we may see in advance the new creation that He will bring about in its totality at the end of time. And in bringing to us the new creation in a preliminary form, He begins the very process of advancing the new creation before it comes in its fulfillment! He continues to bring that new creation to the world through you. Through your prayers, acts of mercy, sanctification, good deeds, acts of healing and kindness, He continues to bring to the nations the new creation in advance of its final fulfillment when He returns again in glory.

This is why anything that was written in former days was written for our encouragement. That is a specific reference to the stuff that was written in the Old Testament. The stuff in the Old Testament was specifically written for your encouragement. That is why you should study the Old Testament and read it with great interest. It is endorsed by the New Testament. The Old Testament was written for your encouragement.

The reason the Old Testament is encouraging is because it gives God's track record. God promised Cain no one would kill him. No one killed Cain. God promised Noah that he and those with him on the ark would survive God's judgment. Noah and those with him survived. God promised that the people enslaved in Egypt would come out and they came out. God promised them manna in the wilderness. There was manna in the wilderness. God promised them that they would possess the Promised Land. They entered and obtained possession of the Promised Land. God promised them that they would go into exile for their sins. They went into exile for their sins. God promised them in His mercy that they would return from exile. In His mercy they returned from exile.

On and on and on it goes. Miracles if necessary are performed to keep His promises. Or His promises are kept through means that human reason can grasp. In either case through any means He chose God kept His promises. His track record is 100% on promise keeping. So when He through His Son Jesus Christ promises you everlasting life in the new heaven and the new earth, this gives you hope.

This hope is for the Gentiles and not just for the blood descendents of Abraham. It is for all of humanity. All have the same creator and redeemer. Thus the Gentiles will sing the praises of God. Thus Gentiles will be called the people of God. The Gentiles will sing together with those Jews who do not get cut off from Israel in God's judgment.

We will all sing with one voice. And when we sing with one voice it will not simply be that we will sing at the same time. It will also be that we will sing of the same things. We will sing of the one Lord Jesus Christ and no other. We will sing of His actions of saving mercy and no other. We will sing of the hope that He has given to us and not of another hope because there is no other hope. In singing in this fashion our songs will be united in a unity of the Spirit. We will be unified in the joy of the hope that He has brought to us.

In this unity of song which the God of hope grants to us welcome one another. Welcome one another just as God in Christ Jesus has welcomed you.

God welcomes the wicked and the lowly. God welcomes in the unrighteous and unholy. God takes those who have no hope and grants them hope. He gives them the hope that His Son died and rose again to guarantee. Through Jesus Christ God welcomes the sick and the lame, those afflicted with the expression of sin. God welcomes them all.

Now, are you above God? Are you more holy and righteous than He is? Are better than God? If you are not better than God, who are you not to welcome those whom God has welcomed? Who are you to consider some to be beneath you when God has welcomed those people? And if God has welcomed even the Gentiles, who are you to think that God's welcome is limited by ethnicity or race? God's welcome is not limited by these things. Therefore your welcome of such shall not be limited by these things either. If your welcome is limited by someone else's age, sickness, race, or language, or performance, or background, then you consider yourself better than God and of that you shall repent or God shall not welcome you either.

This welcome then expands the unity. It expands the unity as far as God would have it expand in ever widening circles of hope of the new heaven and the new earth that are coming.

May the God of endurance fill you with all peace and joy so that you may abound in hope.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.