

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

“The One Hope”

We are working our way through the seven unities or givens that the Apostle Paul mentions here in Ephesians chapter four: We saw that we are part of the one Body of Christ and last week remembered that Jesus has sent us the Comforter Who is the One Spirit. This week we turn to our one Hope!

Hope can be used in many ways, just as words body or spirit can. Hope can be cheapened by hoping for a pony for Christmas or a fancy new car, but hope is generally a good thing to have in life.

- **As parents, we can hope that our covenant children grow up as faithful disciples of Jesus.**
- **As married couples we can hope we have a full life together for many years.**
- **As mothers we can hope that the running of our households brings glory to God and serves each member well.**
- **As husbands we can hope we will provide proper leadership and the resources needed to support the family.**
- **As employees or business owners we can hope that we again bring glory to God in the way we work and serve.**
- **And yes, even in the civil realm we can hope that one day we will again have wise leaders!**

Now those are all certainly good things to hope for, but they are not the one hope the Apostle has in mind in our text. Those kinds of hopes, or ones like hoping you get a particular gift for your birthday, may or may not be fulfilled because they can be impacted by our own sin or even the ultimate purposes of God:

- **Remember the many weeks that we studied the life of Joseph!**
- **There we learned how all of his dashed hopes in the end turned into a better situation that he could not even have imagined as a young man.**
- **We must always see even our legitimate hopes in the light of the greater story that God is telling.**

So what is the one hope that the Apostle now includes in our list of seven unities?

It relates back to what we learned in chapter one where Paul prays for these Saints:

There Paul prayed... “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, [the One Spirit we studied last week] 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...”

Our hope must be in Christ alone, a theme we see often in the NT:

Titus 1: “1 Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began”

Now I need to give a word of caution here because IF anyone who is a Christian is still hoping they will have eternal life, we need to chat. As we said last week, our salvation is secure in the hands of Jesus and that security is WHY we have the hope of eternal life at the end of history. This very hope is taught strongly in the very Epistle that gives us the strongest warnings about falling away...

Hebrews 6: “13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise... 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The writer of Hebrews explains all those images and sacrifices and Temples we find in the OT and then returns to the theme of hope:

Hebrews 10: “19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

Who is faithful? God is faithful!

Our hope is in Christ because He is the One who has purchased our salvation and sent His Spirit, the Comforter to care for us AND to take history where it needs to go [remember all those sermons in Acts!].

This is why we studied Joseph at length because he could not place his hope in his father, certainly not in his brothers, nor Potiphar, not the cup bearer and even in the end in Pharaoh himself...

- But in God because He is the One Who worked all things together for his good and the good of God's people.

In that Book of Beginnings we learned that God has always related to His Creation & His people with covenants! Think back to the opening chapters of the Bible and what do we find?

- God makes a special place for man in the Garden of Eden and then offers him the entire world!

What had small beginnings was intended to grow into a worldwide event with Adam's family filling the whole earth and ruling righteously! What went wrong? The Fall of man!

- Yes, sin disrupted God's plan, but it did not destroy God's plan because if we turn to the final chapters of the Bible, what do we find?

A Garden-City that has filled the whole earth inhabited by all the righteous Saints of all the ages... The final culmination of the prayer that Jesus instructed us to lift up: ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!’

- So how do our hopes fit into this grand story that flows from Genesis chapter three to the final chapters of Revelation?
- By always remembering that we are players in Gods' story! Over and over again in Genesis we learned that that God works on His time-table and not ours!

We saw how He promised redemption even before Adam and Eve could repent, confirming that we love God because He first loved us.

- God then cast them out of the Garden into the world!
- Why would He do that to a couple He just promised salvation to?

He did so not to be mean but rather so He could work out their salvation in history and not have them partake of the Tree of Life & live forever in their fallen state. We then saw the sinfulness of sin as the human race destroyed the earth in just nine generations and after the flood God calls Abraham and promises that the Seed of the Woman who would crush the head of Satan would come from his family.

- God promised Abraham land and a great nation, just as the Father would later promise His Son!

Now here is where the proper context is important: If this principle of hope relates only to what Abraham and his family receive then it is in the end a sad story: That sojourn in Egypt would end badly with God's people thrown into slavery, becoming a bunch of grumblers, and learning habits of idolatry that they could not shake even in the wilderness.

- But knowing the big story, we see that God was not finished with them because they were going to inherit an even greater land: **The Promised Land!**
- Again, IF we see God's story only in the context of the Old Testament people it is again a very sad story!

They never really conquer the land the way they should have, they fall prey to more idolatry, they choose human kings over God and eventually must be cast off in exile even after reaching the Golden age of King Solomon.

- Yes, God is accomplishing His purposes but the Old Testament is largely the story of decline and remnants none the less.

BUT, God's prophets clearly show us that things will be quite different in the New Covenant era...

- As we learned over and over again in our study of Luke's orderly account, the coming of Jesus changed everything!

This is a critical shift that sadly is missed by many in the Church today: The New Covenant, in contrast with the old, is a story of victories and expansion that continues until the Kingdom of Jesus fills the whole earth.

- Carrying out what was God's plan from the very beginning!
- Jesus begins His earthly ministry by proclaiming that His Kingdom had come and that Kingdom will grow until it fills the whole earth.

We spoke about this as we finished the Book of Acts and considered how the Apostle Paul was marched into Rome on the road used by conquering generals & where he even as a prisoner preached the Kingdom of God, no one hindering him! And where did such confidence come from... The One Hope!

- From the sure promises of God!

Yes, Paul was likely chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest awaiting his trial before Emperor Nero... Yes, Rome ruled all of the known world at that time with an iron fist...

BUT Paul knew the rest of the story!

The Apostle Paul knew that Rome had already been struck by Jesus, the stone cut without hands seen in the King's dream and interpreted by Daniel: That mighty empire would soon be as chaff in the wind!

Paul served Jesus whose Kingdom had been firmly established...

- A Kingdom that would now fill the whole earth!

Do you think some may have thought Paul was crazy or at least delusional?

- **Who in that time could imagine the destruction of Jerusalem or the fall of the Roman Empire?**

Paul not only could, but was confident about where history was going!

Could he give all the details? NO!

- **BUT he knew that in a very short period of time BOTH events would be recorded acts of history that future Saints would look back on.**

This is why it is important to remember that the Book of Acts as the story of how the Spirit of God is going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus! This is why the accounts of Abraham and Moses and all of God's people are written and preserved to encourage us!

- **It is what gives us the confidence, yes the hope to believe the Great Commission!**

It is a sad state of affairs today, when we who can look BACK on history and see that the very events that Paul believed would happen soon DID in fact happen, but at the same time are those who fail to believe the promises as they apply to us today?

I have often encouraged us to consider just how difficult it would have been for those listening to Paul there in Rome to imagine what pagan Europe would look like in a thousand years!

[not just pagan Rome, but the barbarians as well!]

Over the next thousand years, what the world now calls the 'dark ages' brought forth Christendom with universities, music, art, limited government, medicine and science that began to confirm the promise of Jesus that we would do His miracles and even greater miracles.

And then imagine a discussion after those first thousand years about the rumors of "new worlds," [perhaps in one of those Cathedrals]: Who could have imagined what God would do over the next five or six hundred years!

We must believe the vision of history that Paul shared with the Saints in Corinth when he explained to them the real power of the resurrection of Jesus:

"20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign UNTIL He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

- **This is the confidence that we should have today!**
- **The early Saints believed the promises of God and in many cases laid down their lives to advance the Kingdom when it was much harder to see how history would unfold.**

Today not only are we to believe that all the nations are being given to Jesus, but also as we will soon learn here in Ephesians 4, the Church as the Bride of Jesus coming as Paul promised "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

- **And yes, it means ALL the Saints, from all quarters of Christendom, which in my mind is very similar to asking Paul or the other 1st Century Saints to believe that Rome would fall or that Jerusalem would be destroyed!**

Yes, these are BIG promises and from a human standpoint almost impossible to believe...

- **But it is not we who must fulfill them, but the God that we serve.**

Now let me go back to that list of hoped for things and have you listen carefully to them again with the greater one Hope that God knows where He is taking history in mind...

It does not take away from the importance of all these good things, but reminds us to keep our lives in perspective, the proper perspective of all of history, because while we can and should hope for all these things, we know that our own sin and more importantly the greater plan of God may have them end up much different then we planned:

- As parents we can hope that our children grow up as faithful disciples of Jesus.
- As married couples we can hope we have a full life together for many years.
- As mothers we can hope that the running of our households brings glory to God and serves each member well.
- As husbands we can hope we will provide proper leadership and the resources needed to support the family.
- As employees or business owners we can hope that we again bring glory to God in the way we work and serve.
- And yes in the civil realm we can hope that one day we will again have wise leaders!

Yes, all VERY good things to hope for but we must always remember the one hope which is the hope of our calling in Christ Jesus because in the end we will each play the role that He needs us to play as history moved toward a glorious future. And that end may be very different then what we first thought it should be just as we learn over and over again from our family history, the history of God's people.

I mentioned that the story is not about us but all about Jesus and as we think about the one hope that we have in Christ, let me close with those glorious words that the Apostle Paul gave to the Saint at Colossi.

Colossians 1 “15 He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

- The story of Creation is all about Jesus and all the Persons of the Godhead will see it properly completed.
- That is our one hope!

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 1

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they...

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said:

“Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”?”