

The Hope of Salvation
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As I sit down to write the sermon tonight, I hope that as we have ventured through N.T. Wright's book together that we have all learned a little more about heaven, the resurrection, and our mission as the church. I do admit that this book and study has been challenging for me and I am sure for those of you that have been reading along with the study. Maybe this is why it has not been talked about very much in the United Methodist Church because all of this is a very challenging, difficult and mysterious topic at times. It has helped me personally to dig into scripture and the meaning behind it further though and I hope that it has caused you to do the same. I have this one last portion to discuss with you, the hope of salvation, and then Pastor Tracy will close us out next week with, the hope of the church.

I thought I would start out with a little story I came across this morning, "A couple from Fort Wayne decided to go to Florida to "thaw out" during a particularly icy winter here in town. They planned to stay at the same hotel where they spent their honeymoon 20 years ago. Because of their hectic schedules, it was difficult for the couple to coordinate their travel plans. So, the husband left Fort Wayne and flew to Florida on Thursday, while his wife planned to fly down the following day.

The husband checked into the hotel. There was a computer in his room, so he decided to send an email to his wife. However, he accidentally left out one letter of her email address and sent the email without realizing his error.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, a widow had just returned home from her husband's funeral. He was a Methodist minister who was called home to glory following a heart attack. The widow decided to check her email, expecting condolence messages from family and friends. But after reading her very first email, she screamed and fainted. The widow's son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor, and saw the computer screen which read:

To: My Loving Wife
Subject: I've Just Arrived Today.

I know you're surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send emails to your loved ones. Since I've just arrived, I thought I would send you an email.

Everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

P. S. Sure is hot down here!!!

Just a little funny to start us off on a more serious topic which I mentioned a moment ago, our salvation.

The hope of salvation, N.T. Wright talks about a misconception that most as he states it, Western Christians have held onto for generations, and maybe you still hold onto this notion today. He states that most assume that when you say salvation that it means going to heaven when you die. But if we review, what we have talked about so far this is not what salvation truly means. Salvation means rescue, but what are we being rescued from? The simple answer is that we are being rescued from death. Wright goes on to say, "But if, when we die, all that happens is that our bodies decompose while our souls (or whatever other word we want to use for our continuing existence) go elsewhere, this doesn't mean we've been rescued from death. It simply means that we've died." This cannot be right because death is to have been defeated. This thought has been transformative for me. Remember that we discussed that when Jesus died and was resurrected that it was an example or model for what was going to happen to us. I had never thought of our salvation in this way before and that we would have some sort of resemblance to our prior existence, but death will have been defeated. We talked about God's good creation and that he is coming to restore relationships and defeat death. Just as was modeled in Jesus being raised from his death. This only touches on the surface as to what salvation is going to look like for us.

We read from Romans 8:18-25 this morning and in that passage, it begins to open up what the hope of salvation means. Salvation is all about hoping in the unseen and believing in what we cannot know or see. The word that comes to mind for me is faith, that we have faith in the knowledge that God is coming to set things right and that we eagerly await the day of our salvation. Verse 18 says, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." We cannot comprehend the glory that is yet to be revealed to us, it is more than we can understand. It goes on to say in verse 19, "For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God." We are eagerly awaiting final judgement when the sons and daughters of God will be revealed. Judgement and salvation are very close to each other, God is putting everything to rights in judgement and rescuing us from injustice and decay. And in verse 23 it goes on to say this, "And not only that, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our body." This points to the redemption of our body, the resurrection of our body and the restoration to eternal life. Can you start to get a glimpse here about how much more our salvation is than what maybe we had held onto for so long? Our salvation is so much more than simply going to heaven.

I also read from Ephesians earlier and this scripture talks about our salvation. Again, listen to these words, "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." N.T. Wright says that the word workmanship means poem, we are Gods artwork, Gods poem, Gods song, Gods

symphony. We as human beings are to be the people through whom Gods fresh ordering of the world can take place. Paul is not saying that we should do good works here and there. What Paul is saying here is that we should be creative, people of new creation, able to do new things, write new books, sing new songs, plant new gardens, to do new building, to teach new things. We should be people of new creation. Christians should be people that are out there making the world come alive. Giving people joy and bringing love into people's lives and at the least, hope to others. The bible says that if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. That person is designed as a means or agent to sort things out here and now. It is a call to us to become people like the messiah. We are anointed with Gods spirit, so that we can be sorting the world out people, we can be people who bring Gods healing, creative, wise, and judgement and discernment to bear upon the world. We can be the gardeners who learn how to plant the new seeds of hope and learn how to get rid of the thorns and thistles. You see part of our salvation is our stewardship here and now, not good works here and there but how we live out our lives, day to day! The scripture says, right there, that God embedded his good works in us beforehand so that we could walk in them.

As I finish typing this, this evening there are millions of people that have no power in Louisiana. Most likely hundreds of thousands of people that have lost their homes and possessions to either high winds or flooding across many states. Many that have lost loved ones to the storms. Others right here in our community that are going to bed tonight with no food in their stomach, or maybe even no roof over their head. How are we Christians of Calvary going to respond? We are embedded with Gods good works and called to live our lives and to walk in them as we eagerly await our salvation. How will we respond?

What have we been talking about for the last four weeks? Right, *Hope!* Christians of Calvary we should be people that are out there making the world come alive. Giving people joy and bringing love into people's lives and at the very least bringing HOPE to them.

Amen!