Hope

First of the Advent/Christmas series, “Christmas Gifts that Won’t Break”

# Scripture: 1 Peter 1:10-21

# Key Thought: God has given us Hope.

# Intro:

One of our fears about the gifts that we give at Christmas is that they will break. When I was a child, our sandbox toys were metal, but even with those, eventually a wheel came off here and there and dents and dings began to make them look rather beat up. Nowadays, children’s toys are plastic and frequently go with the current movie fad anyway so if they can just last until the next movie fad makes them obsolete, we’re good. But often they don’t even last that long. Presents we receive as adults may last a little longer, but they also have a way of wearing out, becoming outdated, or unneeded… Very few of the gifts we give or receive have a permanence about them.

For this Advent/Christmas series, I would like to celebrate the gifts that Jesus gave to us that don’t break. His intangible, yet essential gifts flow into our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. They are more valuable than any of the trimmings and tangibles that we receive from one another.

In the famous love chapter, 2 Cor. 13, Paul says that there are three qualities that abide–faith, hope and love. And he tells us that the greatest of these three is love. Today, I want to consider the second one of those three great qualities. Hope. It is one of the great and unbreakable gifts that God gives to us.

# Present Hope – Jesus comes to us in our times of need.

## God of hope

When we go through down times in our lives we need to be reminded that the gift of hope that God gives is our present possession. Paul prayed for the believers at Rome this way,

 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Rom 15:13 NIV

Notice that he described God as the “God of hope!” One reason our God is the God of hope for us today is as Paul says in the same chapter, God is the “God who gives endurance and encouragement” (Rom. 15:5 NIV).

In 1 Tim. 1:1 Paul is describing his call. In his description he names Jesus as our hope.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, 1 Tim 1:1 NIV

What an amazing characteristic of the Trinity! Our God is the source of hope.

## Close to the brokenhearted

In our last Psalm study of this season, we looked at Psalm 34. One of the beautiful promises in that Psalm is an assurance that gives us hope just when we need it most. When life seems against us, when we are distressed, discouraged, and tempted to give up – even to think that God has forgotten us; just then we need hope! David penned a wonderful verse of assurance for us.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Ps 34:18 NIV

Here is one stanza of a poem I found called Jesus Our Hope (Hieronymus van Alphen (1746-1803) translated by Sietze Buning

Faith cannot do too much expecting.

The words of Jesus all come true.

Friends offer only weak protecting;

Jesus our Friend will see us through.

What limit to the power He gave us?

All power exists for Him to use.

Since Love desires and plans to save us,

how can Omnipotence refuse.

When we walk with Jesus we have hope for every day.

# Future Hope – One day Jesus will return.

## Gives your lives direction

And we also share a future hope.

“Every United Methodist preacher since the time of John Wesley has been asked a series of questions before being admitted into full membership in an annual conference. The first question is “have you faith in Christ?” The second question is, “Are you going on to perfection?” Seventeen more questions follow…

Once during the turbulent 60s, Bishop Gerald Kennedy was asking these historic questions of candidates standing before him in the presence of the annual conference session. When asked if he was going on to perfection, one candidate responded, “No!” Bishop Kennedy quickly replied, “Then where are you going?” It was an appropriate question then, and it is an appropriate question now – not only for preachers but also for all Christians.

Where are you going? If you continue on the course you are charting, where will it end? So often we discount Christ’s return,… We begin reasoning that since Christ is not returned yet, why think about it? But the truth is that at the very best, our lives are short and soon we will have reached our destination, whether Jesus Christ will have returned in a cosmic unfolding or not. Are you going on toward God? If not, where you going?

A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God by Norman Shawchuck and Rueben P. Job pages 407 and 408

When Jesus ascended to heaven, they received a message from two angelic figures.

 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11 NIV

Peter, John, and Paul lived in a simple expectation of that event. Their lives were shaped by their anticipation that the master would return. In our text for today Peter encourages us,

With minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 1 Peter 1:13 NIV

When he was writing to Titus, St. Paul called the coming of Jesus Christ the “blessed hope.” Paul wrote;

The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:11-14 NIV

## The disciples looked forward to seeing Jesus

The question arises for us, why did the apostles look forward to that future day so much?

The obvious, number one answer was that they looked forward to seeing Jesus again!

This future meeting with Jesus has various descriptions in the New Testament.

The apostle John says,

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3 NIV

The apostle Paul said,

Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. 1 Cor 13:12 NKJV

## When Jesus comes, salvation will be brought to completion

The second reason why the coming of Jesus is the blessed hope is implied also in John’s words. When we see Jesus, more aspects of the salvation that God is bringing to us will be completed. The whole creation is groaning now, waiting for the transformation which God will bring about. When we die, most Christians believe our spirit goes to be immediately with Jesus. But our new body that God has promised, with its resurrection perfection awaits the second coming of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has been given to us now as a guarantee ahead, a first installment, on the perfection that is to come.

Sometimes Christians have described Jesus’ coming as if it would happen secretly, like people would look around and wonder what happened. I believe that is not a Biblical teaching. Jesus describes his own second coming us as something that you can’t miss. He warned about those who would pose as false Messiah’s too.

For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. “So, if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man…

 “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Matt 24:24-27, 30,31 NIV

What does all this mean for us? It means that history has a direction. It is not going in circles. It is not wandering aimlessly; it going somewhere. History as we know it has a climactic ending when Jesus comes.

People who have taken this teaching to heart have responded in different ways. Back in Paul’s day there were some in the city of Thessalonica who decided that if Jesus was coming soon, there was no need to work. They thought they could just take it easy and wait for him to come. Paul wrote back and told them that was a wrong approach, that God expected them to work, to be diligent, be about the Master’s business. That kind of approach, unfortunately, did not disappear from history. In American history, there’ve been groups who decided to go up on a hillside and wait, expecting Jesus to appear at a particular time. This is a discouraging misuse of the idea that Jesus will return. I remember having to change my sermons back in 1989 to help people deal with the idea that some famous preacher had decided that Jesus was certain to return that fall. But here we are 30 years later.

Yet the apostle Peter warns us about the opposite conclusion also. Throughout history there’ve always been those who decided that since Jesus hadn’t come, and it had been a while, that he certainly wasn’t going to come. Or they decided to spiritualize his coming in some way in order to maintain the theology without the expectation. There are still people doing that today. But Peter issued a stern warning about that as well.

In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” …

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:3-13 NIV

## When Jesus comes he will reward his servants

When we look at it right, the blessed hope of Christ’s coming is a great hope for us for a third reason. It will usher in the time when Christ’s servants receive their “well done” and their reward. Jesus himself said,

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. Luke 12:35-38 NIV

That is the prize toward which Paul labored. That is likely part of the crown of righteousness of which he spoke. All those who labor for the Master can look forward to his coming to reward his servants. Jesus told us that not one cup of cold water given to someone in need will be forgotten when God rewards his servants. No wonder Paul said,

 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:14 NIV

# Conclusion

If you’re here this morning and you are short on hope, you have come to the right place. In accordance with the Scriptures that we have read, I point you to Jesus who is the giver of a hope that does not disappoint. Our God is a God of hope. And he comes along side us right at the times when we need it most.

But perhaps the question in the story I told gave you pause. “Where are you going?” Are you and I like the godly Abraham whom the Bible describes as looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10)? If so, our lives will be shaped and directed by the “blessed hope” as Paul’s was! We must ask ourselves, “Do we live into the expectation that Jesus will come again?” It will change our thinking, guaranteed!