

We are in the middle of a series of sermons about God's promises. God has made many promises to us. We are looking at five of them in this series.

Two weeks ago, we learned that through reliance on these promises God would transform our character. God is reshaping our character to match the perfect character of Jesus. And God is rescuing us from the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. That's good news.

Last Sunday we celebrated God's promise of righteousness. The word righteousness means a right relationship with God. None of us is righteous enough to gain heaven. Heaven can only be ours with a perfect righteousness. God gives us this righteousness when we put our faith in Jesus.

This morning we are looking at the promise of heaven. In order to introduce this promise, I want to do a little word association with you. I am going to say a word, and I want you to latch on to the first word that comes to your mind. And then I'll ask you to share that word with us.

Here's the first word: **Christmas**. What is the first word you thought of?

The next word is: **Vacation**. What is the first word you thought of?

The last word I have for you is: **Heaven**. What is the first word you thought of?

(possible answers: forgiveness of all sin, eternal life, a home in heaven, live with Jesus in God's presence, freedom from the power and temptation of sin, escape from God's wrath, our resurrection from death, a resurrection body like Jesus')

I asked you for only one word. If I had asked you for five words or five different things, you likely would have mentioned the same kinds of things. The point of this exercise is to see that there is often a bundle of things that we associate with a place or a time or an event or a season. For example, we know that the Jews of the first century were longing for the coming of the Messiah, the special messenger from God. There were a bundle of things they expected to happen when the Messiah showed up.

- **God would form a new covenant with them,**
- **they would all receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,**
- **the nation's sins would be forgiven,**
- **Israel would be free from the control of foreign nations,**
- **Israel would have great security from all enemies,**
- **Israel would experience great prosperity,**
- **Israel would be a light to the nations for Yahweh,**
- **all this would never end.**

In the minds of the Jews, all of these things were associated with the coming Messiah.

Just as the Jews were waiting for a bundle of things to happen, so Christians are waiting for a bundle of things to happen. We have more than one thing in mind when we speak

of heaven. There are a bunch of promises associated with heaven. We use the one word heaven to represent them.

Another word in the Bible that often stands for this bundle of things is the word hope. The Christian hope is the fulfillment of all these promises from God about our future. For instance look at the following passage in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

The hope he is writing about is not Christmas. It isn't vacation. It isn't retirement. The hope he is writing about is the future blessings God has promised to us.

Why does he call it hope? Because we don't have it yet. We can't see it yet. It has been promised, but we have no proof that it is real. In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome he writes about this aspect of hope.

Romans 8:24 (NIV) Who hopes for what he already has?

It would be ridiculous for me to say to you, "I hope I have this shirt I have on." Or, "I hope I have a blue Ford pickup truck." I do have this shirt on. I do have a blue Ford pickup truck. I'm not hoping I have these. I already do have them. I see them, feel them. I wear the shirt. I drive the truck. I know I have them so I'm not hoping I have them.

The word hope is associated with the future. We use the word hope for things in the future that we want to have in the future. Or we use the word hope for things we don't want to have in the future. For example, the weather man says it is supposed to rain this week. I hope it rains on my raspberry plants this week. I hope it doesn't rain too much on my raspberry plants this week. I don't know which, if either, of those things will come to pass.

The word hope is associated with the future. We hope for good things we don't yet have. We don't hope for things we already have. There is no point in hoping for things we already have. We hope for good things we don't yet have.

Many of the things God has promised to us, we don't see yet. We aren't experiencing them yet. We want them and we hope for them. When they come true, we will no longer be hoping for them. We will be having them, enjoying them. Until then we hope for them.

Now the world says, "You foolish Christians. You have no evidence that what you hope for is going to happen." But the world is wrong. We DO have evidence that these promises will come true. And we live now as if they will come true later. We live differently now because we have such confidence in them coming true.

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Let me give you my version. **"Faith is trusting that all God's promises of future blessings will materialize, even though you can't see them now."** (RSP)

Why? Why do we believe these promises? What is the evidence that they are true?

We trust the promises of God because God made them.

Imagine a man who has built a big business. He has a factory that produces a product. He employs a hundred people. He is a good husband, good father, and good boss. He has a reputation for integrity, honesty, and faithfulness. One day he brings his son to the factory and says, "Son, one day this will all be yours." The boy looks around the factory. He can see it, touch it, hear it, and smell it. It is tangible. The boy chooses to believe the promise. He doesn't believe because the factory is tangible. He believes because his dad made the promise.

Unlike the factory which can be seen, touched, and heard, we cannot see yet the things that God has promised to us. But we believe in them for the same reason the boy believed in the promise made to him. We put our faith in the one who made the promise.

Our faith is in God who has made us the promises. Any promise God makes to us we trust because of who God is. Our faith in God's promises are based on our trust in God, in His character. We know God is good. We say so every Sunday. We know God is good, God is faithful. God is kind. God loves us. So we trust all His promises about our future blessings.

We can't see heaven. We can't see heaven, despite a 4 year old boy's experience on the operating table. We don't yet know heaven, but we know the one who made us the promises of heaven. We believe Him and so have hope that the promises will come true.

And what promises they are. Heaven is going to be so wonderful. When I get up in the morning and have back pain, or a sinus headache, or arthritis in my elbow, I rejoice when I remember God's promises that in heaven there will be no pain.

Sometimes I slip and fall into sin and feel the weight of my shame and guilt and turn to God in confession and repentance. Then I experience His presence and I rejoice to know that in heaven I won't sin.

When I am afraid, or worried, or stressed, or embarrassed I turn to God and He comforts me. Then I rejoice to know that I will live in His comfort forever in heaven.

How great is heaven going to be? We can't even imagine. It will be so much better than the best we ever have on earth that there is no comparison. But I wanted to give you some picture to make the comparison.

The Chinese buffet down the street is now closed, so my story won't hurt their business. Do you ever get the cake at a Chinese buffet restaurant? I've never had good cake at a Chinese buffet restaurant. If you have, consider yourself blessed. They don't put enough oil in the cake to keep it moist. And they don't put enough sugar in the cake to

make it nicely sweet. It is just sort of bland. It looks great on the plate. But it is disappointing.

I compare that to a different cake. A couple of years ago my wife was in South Carolina visiting her dad. I was in Safeway getting some milk. The milk is back by the bakery. The bakery makes cakes and packages individual pieces to sell. I saw this huge double wide piece of chocolate cake and bought it. My wife says it is at least three pieces of cake. But it's not. It's only one really big piece.

Anyway, I bit into this cake and it was so rich and moist and sweet. Some of you may think it was sweeter because my wife wasn't home to see my eat the whole thing. But that wasn't it. It was a super rich cake. It was so good. It was a hundred times better than the cake at the Chinese buffet.

Yet, if they have chocolate cake in heaven it will a thousand times better than the great cake I had from the store. The richness of chocolate cake in heaven will be beyond compare to anything on earth. And it won't have any calories. Whatever food there is to enjoy in heaven will be the best food you have ever put in your mouth.

Everything about heaven will be like that. We believe this because of who made us these promises. The evidence for the truth of these promises is God Himself. Believe the promises as much as you believe in the God who made them.

But we must do more than believe.

1 John 3:3 (NIV) Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Let me give you some quick application of this. **Because of the hope you have in Jesus...**

Purify your heart. (Matthew 5:8)

Increase your love for Jesus and your devotion to Him.

Purify your body. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Purify yourself from anything that harms your body. Stop smoking, drinking to excess, over-indulging in sweets, fats, meats. Stop getting too little sleep, or too much. Stop getting no exercise, or abusing your body in the name of fun. Purify your body.

Purify your spirit. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

You purify your spirit through learning the difference between the truth of God and lies about God. Our world is full of statements about God. The truth is in the Bible. You need to be learning that truth so that you will fill your spirit with truth. Then you will recognize false teaching when you hear it.

Purify your mind. (1 Timothy 5:2)

I felt led to focus, briefly on one specific impurity of the mind. Pursue sexual purity. All sexual perversion and sin starts in the mind. Rid yourself of sexual lust, fantasies, pornography, flirting, or touching that can lead to more of the same.

In short, if we are fully trusting in His promises of heaven we will repent of all known sin in us and work with God to eradicate it from us. We will cooperate with God's efforts to deliver us from the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

God has promised us His Spirit, eternal life, a home in heaven, to live in His presence, freedom from the presence of sin, a resurrection body that will last eternity without pain, and much more. Do you have the hope of these things in Jesus? Have you put your faith in Jesus? Have you admitted to God that you need a savior and rest in Jesus as that Savior? Have you turned your life over to Jesus as Lord?

If not, then today, right now, I urge you to say yes to Jesus. Seek in Jesus salvation from the consequences of your sin and God will forgive you and save you and give you an inheritance in heaven.

Put your faith and life in Jesus and all the promises of heaven will be yours.