

## “The Light of Grace: Hope”

### Genesis 12: 1-9

1 The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he build an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

9 Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. (desert)

### Luke 1: 67-79

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come to His people and redeemed them. 69 He raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David 70 (as He said through His holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember His holy covenant, 73 the oath He swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve Him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, 77 to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

I sure hope Christmas gets here soon. I really don’t want to wait anymore. I sure hope it comes fast. I hope it starts tomorrow! I hope I get all my gifts this weekend. And I hope that I get to have Christmas dinner this Sunday.

As you listened to me say that first paragraph, you were probably thinking to yourself, I don't think pastor knows what day it is. He thinks Christmas is going to come this weekend. It's only the start of Advent. We have many days left, before Christmas comes. What is he thinking? Has Pastor Rick gone bonkers? He must be losing it in his old age. **[NOTE 1]**

You're right. Christmas isn't coming tomorrow. (not about the bonkers or old age part) Christmas is almost a month away. The hope that I expressed is a wrong hope, isn't it? It isn't based on reality. It isn't going to come true no matter how much I may want it to. It isn't a good hope. It isn't a hope worth having because I will only be disappointed. When hopes are not based on reality or anything that is not reliable they can disappoint us or simply prove to be an illusion.

Many people have this kind of hope without even realizing it. An example of this kind of hope is when people hope that they will go to heaven when they die (apart from Jesus, meaning based on their being good enough or on their own merit). These people are going to be deeply disappointed. Yet, that's what a lot of people think. They think that they can earn their way to heaven by being a good person, or by doing enough good stuff, or even just by being better than most other people. I actually heard one person say, "I am basically a good person, never shot anyone, never stole anything, based on what I see on the news, I'll probably make to heaven. They actually think our lives are graded on a curve. Well as long as 60% of people live worse than me, I deserve heaven. Well, what does the Bible say?

In our Old Testament passage from Genesis, we see that God spoke directly to Abraham to tell him that he was going to be the father of many nations. He promised a lot of wonderful things including that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It was God's promises to Abraham that gave him the hope that he had. Unlike my hope that I expressed earlier, which was based on nothing but my own wishful thinking, Abraham's hope was based on something real and sure. His hope was based on the sure promises of God. So what makes a hope sure or very likely is what the hope is based on. If your hope is based on God's Promise, His Word, then you have a sure hope. **[NOTE 2]**

We still have those same promises today. While we don't audibly hear God's voice speaking directly to us and to no one else, we do hear him speak to all of us through his Word, which was written down ages ago in the Bible. The Bible is God's letter to us. It is full of some wonderful accounts of Him dealing with his people, sometimes in some not-so-happy ways that were necessary to save mankind from itself, such as the Flood or the plagues in Egypt. Other times the stories are wonderful portrayals of how God saved His people in miraculous ways, such as the crossing of the Red Sea or the time He defeated an army of thousands with just 300 men who were armed with clay pots.

All of those accounts are in the Bible to remind us that God keeps his Word. He doesn't falter or fail. He doesn't take it back. God keeps his promises. At times, He does say that he is going to destroy someone, but then He relents from bringing disaster upon them because they repent—they turn from their sin and turn to God for forgiveness. But the thing is, He promised to do that too. He always keeps His promises, especially His promises of love, forgiveness and salvation. **[NOTE 3]**

Our hope for salvation is based on the fact that God always keeps His promises. That is a sure and certain hope. It is just the opposite of the hope that I expressed at the beginning because our hope is based on God's promise to save us from ourselves. We don't really even have to say, "I hope I will go to heaven". We can say "I know I will go to heaven." What we can say about hope is that our hope is in Jesus, which means that our hope is in who Jesus is and what Jesus has already done for us as the Son of God, the Lamb of God, our Redeemer.

In our Gospel reading from Luke, Zechariah had the same thing happen to him that Abraham did, but this time it was through an angel. The angel told him that he was going to have a son, just like God told Abraham. This time, though, Zechariah wasn't so sure. I'm not sure I would have reacted any differently given his age and his and Elizabeth's inability to have children. But since Zechariah didn't believe, God gave him a sign that was so clear that there was no way he would mistake it for anything else. He took away his ability to speak until his son, John, was born.

In this way, God reminded Zechariah that he always keeps his promises. He showed Zechariah that what he said is true and real. When Zechariah sings his song in our passage for today, it is an affirmation, and the expression of joy that God always keeps his promises, even when we don't believe them. We still have that ancient song in our hymnal, and we still sing it quite often in our own church services as a reminder to us that God keeps his promises. **[NOTE 4]**

When you want to pass a test in school, you can decide not to study and have hope that the test will be easy, that you will miraculously know the answers, or that something magical will happen to your brain. Or, you can study and then have hope that the knowledge you gained from that studying will carry you through to do well on the test and get a good grade. Which is a more sure hope?

Your hope in Jesus is even more certain than that because there are no variables, no circumstances, and no changes and chances that will take away what Christ has already done. It has already been accomplished. It's already done! That is as sure and certain as it gets! Believe it, and trust in it today and always. It tells us in Romans chapter 5 and verses 4 and 5 that "endurance develops strength of character and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment (other version "never proves to be an illusion") For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill

our hearts with His love.” And finally, listen to these words from 1 John chapter 5: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God. And everyone who loves the Father loves His children, too. We know we love God’s children if we love God and obey His commandments. Loving God means keeping His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome. For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God ... And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God’s Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.” So what are you going to do about it? Yes, I ask you this almost every Sunday. For the reason that if we just listen to a few good words and say, “Good word, Pastor” and don’t apply it, it is worthless. Those are not my words. That is directly from the book of James chapter 1, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!” So please write down something in your bulletin, in your phone, on a sticky note, but somewhere you will have occasion to see it later, one thing that you will do today, this week, to apply this message, even if it is just to remind yourself of what Jesus has done for you. Remember that our hope as children of God, is a sure and certain hope that never proves to be an illusion, never disappoints. We can know that when we die, we will be in heaven. Then ask yourself, how does that effect my behavior, my words, my actions? [NOTE 5]

We can really celebrate Christmas because it is when our Savior and Redeemer came to earth as a little baby, experienced the whole of human existence, served others and gave us an awesome example to follow. But He didn’t stop there, then He died on a cross to pay the innocent blood sacrifice that was owed to pay for our sins. And since our sins are paid for, justified, we are forgiven and free to serve God and follow Jesus while we live on earth knowing that when it is all said and done that we will be in heaven with Jesus. Now that’s something to celebrate! Let’s pray ... Amen.

**“Sermon Notes for “The Light of Grace: Hope” based on Genesis 12 and Luke 1  
Given in Doster on First Sunday of Advent December 3, 2023**

- I. A “good” hope is based on reality, on something solid, faithful, and true.
- II. The only “sure and certain” hopes that we have are based on God’s Promises, His Word. These hopes never prove to be an illusion.
- III. The Bible gives us many examples to prove that God ALWAYS keeps His Word. God ALWAYS keeps His promises.

- IV. How does the sure and certain hope of eternal life change how you celebrate Christmas?
- V. What are you going to do about it? What is one way that you can remember what God has done for you by sending His Son Jesus Christ? Please write down one thing you will do now.