

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

April 19th, 2026

Sermon Title: Hope That is unseen

Sermon Text: Romans 8:24-25

Rom. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Rom. 8:23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Rom. 8:24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

Rom. 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Main Point: Because our salvation is not yet fully realized, God calls us to live as a hopeful people, anchored by the certainty of Christ and refined through a patient, eager expectation of the glory to be revealed.

Outline:

1. The Nature of Hope
2. The Object of Hope
3. The Experience of Hope

Our Father, we ask you, with your Son, to send the Spirit to illuminate your Scriptures, so that we not only hear the truth and see the truth, but so that we would respond with hope... that we would not only think, but that we would also worship even in seasons of hardship as we await the day of the revelation of the sons of God. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Every person who has ever read *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* knows about the eagles. When necessary for the plot, the eagles swoop down, save the day, and deliver our heroes from danger, including rescuing Frodo from the exploding Mount Doom. Well, the author, J.R.R. Tolkien was constantly pestered with questions about why the eagles didn't just pick Frodo up and carry him straight to Mount Doom. And Tolkien famously became irritated with a fan who asked him about this, and responded with something like, "Shut up about the eagles."

In his letters you can see that Tolkien knew that these eagles were a dangerous literary device because if they were constantly there, there would be no story. His argument was that if they had simply flown straight to Mount Doom to destroy the ring, there would have been no story, no growth of character, and no truly earned happy ending.

We as Christians have to live in hope. And we may wonder why does God even make hope necessary? Why doesn't he just give us everything now? Why not get our new bodies the moment we believe? Why not be instantly glorified and have our suffering end? Why make us wait for the second coming of Christ at all?

The question people ask about the eagles is a question we may sort of deep-down wonder for ourselves: "Lord, why not fly us straight to the destination with no stops in between?"

Now, God doesn't tell us to shut up, thankfully. He's more patient than Tolkien was with his nosy fans. But in a sense, like Tolkien, God has chosen to tell a big story, not a small and short story, and it's a story that intentionally involves human participants and our whole lives (however long they may be). And that means that we are mid-story and have to live trusting the author that he will bring us all the way from here to there.

And today Paul is saying, that means living in this in-between state he calls "hope."

So today let's consider what it means to hope, and to be a hopeful people by first considering the nature of hope, second by considering the object of hope, and then finally by thinking about the experience of hope.

1. The Nature of Hope

First this morning, let's consider the nature of hope. What actually is it?

Specifically what is *Christian* hope?

Well, Christian hope is a consequence of salvation. We were born in sin, and if we are trusting in Jesus Christ, then it's safe to say that God has saved us. But we may have noticed that getting saved isn't like the quickening in Highlander where we suddenly feel like superpowered heroes or something. In many ways we still feel like the same person. We hopefully can see differences, we aren't who we were. But in many ways things are still similar.

We are saved through faith in Christ, but our bodies are still the same, and as we've seen in Romans 7, we still have indwelling sin.

This means that even though we are justified and have peace with God, there is still more to come. We have been adopted, but we don't have everything just yet that pertains to that adoption. And this means that we are hopers, not possessors. We don't yet have the full weight of glory.

Don't misunderstand. This doesn't mean our salvation is incomplete. Francis Turretin used to say that you should remember: our *right* to salvation is full and complete, but it's our full *enjoyment* of the benefits of salvation that we're still waiting for. We aren't waiting to be saved. We're waiting for the full revelation of the salvation we already have. According to verse 23, what we have right now is the firstfruits, and the rest is coming. And because it's still to come, this is where this idea of hope becomes so important.

Hope is the thing that bridges our current groaning (which we saw last week) and our future glory. And that might make us feel tempted to think, "Why the need for current groaning, then?" Why do we have to experience failure and weakness; why should we know hardship and challenges at all? Why not just take us to the destination like the Eagles in Lord of the Rings? Why doesn't God do that for us?

I raised this question earlier, but this is probably the right place for us to really think about it: why *doesn't* God just pick us up the moment we believe and take us straight to the destination? Peter Martyr actually asks this question in his romans

commentary. And he mentions three reasons. Nothing exhaustive here, but three reasons why God doesn't just transmute us right to the last day or instantly glorify us and give us our new bodies.

First, he said, hope is an essential virtue for believers. If we received everything now, then our life would not be a tapestry on which God could show his glory and his work. Our life wouldn't display the worth and glory of God because there would be no trust in hardship, no forward-looking hope in the midst of sorrow. But God desires a people of hope, because when we hope in him and trust in him, his glory is seen and his worth is magnified. Because it's us declaring, "You can trust him! He is good! He is glorious!" That's the first reason he says God doesn't take us to the finish line the moment we believe. Because the hope we are forced to live in is a mirror in which people can see the worthiness of God.

Second, Vermigli said that God has decided to make our salvation "invisible" for a time. And so what that does is, it forces us to look away from the "perishable" things of this world so we don't depend on them. The "waiting" that happens between now and that great day is a process in which God is refining us like gold. That's the second reason.

Then third, he mentions patience which is worked in us as a glorious evidence that the Spirit is truly in us. Without the wait, there are no virtues of hope, trust, faith, and patience. There would be no sense in which our life preaches a sermon that says, "God is glorious, and he is worth even this momentary affliction."

Now you might think, "That sounds great to me. I don't like to suffer!" But on some level, that question is really asking, why does there even have to be a story? Why couldn't it just be that Adam was there, he fell, and then God said, "I'm going to save you," and Adam believed, and so he was saved and there was the happy ending.

And in a sense, when you ask that, you're asking an even bigger question, though: "Why is there a story at all?". Personally, I'm glad there is something rather than nothing. I am glad that God has chosen to spread out his glory over the tapestry of human history, to create people like us who can see and love and trust and yes, hope.

But we are told repeatedly over and over again that he created all things, all people, and does everything for his own glory. Meaning that all of this displays God and his manifold attributes. God's answer is that he created all things, including us, and including this story and everything that happens in it, as an expression and outworking of his glorious and majestic nature.

And let me add one thing. And I don't want to lead with this because if I lead with this then it just sounds like I'm dodging a difficult question, but we do need to remember this: maybe we think, "well I still don't think those are good enough reasons that God doesn't just give us our full inheritance right away."

So here's what I need to say: ultimately it doesn't really come down to our judgment anyway. Why doesn't it? Because God is greater than us, wiser than us, he is infinite in his knowledge, and he is perfectly wise. And so at the end of the day, God himself is the creator, the author, the potter – you might say. And as Paul is later going to ask, How can we possibly look at the potter and say, "why did you make me like this?" He is the wise, infinite, self-existent, glorious and magnificent maker of it all, and the world and life is our God showing himself to us, so that we can see what he is really like.

His glory is seen in the world, but also in us as we hope in him and his promises.

And this means that yes, what we have is incomplete. It isn't finished. It is possessed, but still not fully enjoyed.

2. The Object of Hope

Okay, so we've reflected a bit on what hope is, and what is the nature of hope. But consider also *what* it is that we're meant to hope in. That brings us to our second point: What is the object, the thing we are meant to look forward to when we're hoping?

Well remember verse 23, where Paul spoke about the groaning of creation and of us. What did he say? He said, "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

We are waiting for our adoption. “But wait. He already told us we are adopted earlier in Romans!” Paul seems to be saying, the adoption has happened, but that doesn’t mean we receive our full inheritance the moment the adoption happens. That comes later. For now, we are received into the family, we live under the protection of our father. We have everything we could ever need right now. And yet there is an incredible inheritance that we still don’t have in hand. We have the beginnings of it, but it’s only just begun.

And so when we hope for what we can’t see, we are really talking about hoping in Jesus himself. We don’t look forward to an idea, we look forward to a person. That’s why in 1 Tim. Paul refers to “Christ Jesus our hope.” And that person (Jesus Christ) will keep his promise to us in one of two ways: either we will die (as everyone before us has) and be transformed to be like the glorified Christ. In which case we will experience what Paul says in Philippians 3: “[Christ] will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

OR he will return, and when that happens we will also be transformed in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. When he returns, he will come personally, visibly, gloriously, and suddenly. But in both of these cases (whether we die or whether he returns first), it is Jesus Christ who will be the one to change us and transform us.

And so the object of our hope... the one we hope in... [have you figured it out?] is none other than Jesus Christ himself.

So we’ve seen the nature of hope... We’ve seen the object of hope...

3. The Experience of Hope

But third, I want us to conclude by bringing this all together as we consider the *experience of hope*.

We just talked about the object of hope. The object of our hope is Jesus Christ, who is glorious, unchanging, and objective. He is there, he is true, and he never wavers or changes.

But it's one thing to know what we hope in. It's another thing to actually live experiencing the act of trusting and hoping. The experience can be very different than just talking about Jesus. We have to live in it. We live *in* hope. We live trusting.

This is so hard though, because the objects of our hope are invisible and future. Francis Turretin says that hope is "faith stretched out." It is our faith, looking to the future such that we say, "I trust God for what he's done. I trust him for now, and I trust him for what's coming. I trust what he's doing and what he will do."

Now, as I said, that's easy to say, harder to do. But to make it even trickier (at least superficially), Paul also talks about the way that we do the waiting. In verse 23 He says that for the Christian, "we wait *eagerly*." Just think about that for a minute. How many people associate eagerness with waiting. It's usually one or the other.

And then on the other hand, he says in verse 25, we wait patiently. How do you patiently wait *and* eagerly wait? How are you supposed to wait... but with eagerness?

Well, here comes Peter Martyr to the rescue again. He tells us that we shouldn't think of eager waiting as a sort of restless anxiety. Instead he says it's better to think of it as an earnest expectation. He tells us to picture this eager waiting as someone craning their neck to catch a glimpse of someone coming from a distance. Every time my daughter flies back from college to visit us for the holidays, that's what we're like waiting for her plane to arrive. Just watching and waiting and staring at every face: "Is that her? No, that's not her. Is that her?"

So maybe you'll find this helpful: this eagerness is the "energy of hope." It's what hope feeds off of. Eagerness is why it can keep going and going even when it doesn't have what it wants yet. Think of it like this: the whole reason we *can* be patient is because we are so eager to see something that we know is definitely coming.

But then how does patience fit here? Well again, Peter Martyr says it's best to think of patience as a steadfastness that isn't broken or shattered by hardships. So when you pair eagerness and patience you find yourself able to wait without despairing that we still have so far to go.

And maybe this helps as well: we are called to wait. But our waiting isn't a passive or lazy sitting around just wasting time until it's all over. Instead, we need to think of our waiting as preparation. We are eagerly preparing ourselves to enjoy this glorious thing that God is doing.

Think of patience as the hearth that keeps the fire of our eagerness from burning down the house. It's like God wants us to be zealous and to expect wonderful and glorious things. But he wants patience to come in and help us to keep from become discouraged because we're so excited about this thing that's coming.

Patient waiting and eager waiting aren't opposites. They're two sides of the coin of healthy balanced spiritual expectation as we get ready for the amazing blessings that God has told us are coming our way through his son, Jesus Christ.

There are so many before us who have had to live this way, with this eager patience. Hebrews 11 tells us about so many examples of people who looked forward to an exciting and bright future in Christ. Think of what the author of Hebrews does. He mentions Old Testament saints like Abel and Abraham, and then the author says this:

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”

There's more, but let's just stop there a moment. He is saying, Abel died in faith. So did Abraham. And yet they lived on hope, didn't they. Because they trusted, but it was a future-oriented trust. They looked to the future and they said, “God will keep his promises. God is good. I trust God.” And in fact, without perhaps knowing the name of Jesus, they trusted in the coming Messiah... who was still to come!

So if we are tempted to complain, “Lord, why don't you just give it all to us now? Why make us live this life where we have sin nature and we yearn to be free of it? Why not just carry us to the finish line?”

We need to answer our own complaints by remembering, this is the way God has always dealt with his saints: he shapes us and grows us through the process of faith, trust, hope, and patience! He gives us opportunities to trust and to grow in our trust.

This is where not only the example of the saints before us, but the knowledge of God's sovereignty is so amazing. Romans is a book saturated in the sovereignty of God. And without the knowledge that God is over all, that he is all powerful, that he is all knowing, that he is all wise... without these things, our hope would just be an optimistic attitude instead of a real knowledge of whose hands all of this is in. But we have hope, not optimism. This section of Romans 8 is about HOPE!

Conclusion

Now, that passage in Hebrews keeps going. Listen to this, and let me encourage you to live this way and to stretch your faith into the future. Listen to this:

“They were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

Let me just say: it's one thing to identify and define hope. It's another thing to live in it, especially when it's hard. But the hope Scripture gives isn't sort of flimsy and built on our moods. It is rooted in God himself and in his integrity that he will keep his promises. And it's rooted in his very nature and person: *this* is what He is like. *This* is what he can do. He can do all of it, and keep every promise.

And in this short passage today in Romans 8, Paul is essentially saying: “Don't be surprised that you are *still* suffering. That is the exact nature of the 'hope' into which you were called.”

And so what this means is that God isn't calling us to wait for a Great Eagle to drop us at the finish line. Instead, we're walking with the King through the story that he's writing.

So when God calls us to live *in* hope, he's simply telling us to look to him *now*, and to know, we'll be able to keep looking to him and trust him to take us all the way, and to finish in us this thing that he's started. Why? Because we are looking forward to a better country than this one, a heavenly one. We aren't there yet, but

like the saints of old, we have seen these promises, and much like those saints of old we will also have to greet the completion of those promises from afar until the day comes.

Once hope is seen, though, it dissolves into something else: full possession. And we don't have that yet. But isn't it interesting that there is coming a day when we will not be hopeful people any longer? And the reason of course is that we won't be hoppers anymore, we will be possessors. We will have it. And that means that there is coming a day when faith will become sight, and hope will become our full possession.

Let's pray.

Lord, we are weak. And often in that weakness we yearn for an escape or a shortcut. But you have told us here today that instead we're meant to wait eagerly and patiently. We have your Son, we have your Promises, and so we ask that you would help us to live in that rock solid hope, one day at a time. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.