An Empire of Hope

Thomas Robinson, Certain Hope, Wondrous Love 4, December 29, 2013

Romans 15:7-13

⁷ Therefore welcome one another as the Messiah welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸ For I tell you that the Messiah became a servant to the circumcised on behalf of God's truth, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs (fathers), ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles (nations) might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written,	"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles (nations), and sing to your name ."	[Psa. 18:49]
¹⁰ And again it is said	," Rejoice , O Gentiles (nations), with his people ."	[Deut. 32:43 LXX]
¹¹ And again,	" Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles (nations), and let all the peoples extol him."	[Psa. 117:1]
¹² Again Isaiah says,	" The root of Jesse will come, even he who rises to rule the Gentiles (nations); in him will the Gentiles (nations) hope ."	[Isa. 11:10 LXX]

¹³ May the **God of hope** fill you with all **joy** and **peace** in **believing**, so that by the **power** of the **Holy Spirit** you may **abound in hope**.

Isaiah 11:1-2

¹ There shall come forth a shoot	² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,	
from the stump of Jesse,	the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,	
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.	the Spirit of counsel and might,	
	the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.	

Luke 2:10-14

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "*Fear not*, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this will be **a sign** for you: you will find a baby wrapped in **swaddling cloths** and lying in **a manger**."

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased!"

Luke 2:28-32

 ²⁸ Simeon took him (Jesus) up in his arms and blessed God and said,
²⁹ "Lord, now you are releasing your servant, [Psa 116:15-16] according to your word, in peace; [Isa 57:2]
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation [Isa 52:8,10] ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, [Isa 40:5]
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, [Isa 42:6; 49:6] and for glory to your people Israel. " [Isa 46:13]

Ephesians 1:18-20a

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead....

From Beginning to End and Back Again

- Advent focuses especially beginnings of Jesus' story. But that incarnation holds all the story before it and reaches to the end of all that follows. God's life coming among us ends with the creation of resurrection life human life that can live forever with God.
- <u>Ironies are everywhere</u>: Obscure Nazareth/Bethlehem. Unknown Mary. Manger. Shepherds. But the announcements are glorious: Great joy. All People. Savior, Messiah. David's throne, Israel, Gentiles. God's glory. Peace on earth. God's salvation. Light. Revelation.
- <u>How does this go out into the world</u>? The long course of church history shows that we love to tell of shepherds and mangers, but trust more the power of Augustus and Herod. The church was seduced by power, Christendom, even in the Reformation. With Europe's imperialism it went forth to conquer. We live in a new period of irony. Faith is weak in the old areas of Christendom, but thriving across the world with the withdrawal of empires.
- <u>Paul is writing to Rome</u>, the center of <u>empire</u>, the nations, Gentiles, rule, glory. Our text is the end of the body of the letter. He is bringing the full message of Jesus – Incarnation, Teaching, Ministry, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Holy Spirit – to full impact in the capital of the world. Not surrendering to Rome's understanding of power, but proclaiming God's Anointed King, a greater, eternal story, an inclusive empire of Praise, Peace, and Hope.

Hope in a World of Fatalism

- <u>Hope is a word of remarkable power</u>. Hope does <u>not</u> mean uncertainty, as we often use it. It affirms a yet-to-be-fulfilled future that we are moving toward. Thus it clarifies the present; gives it meaning and purpose. Jesus embodies that hope, in incarnation, beauty and power of life, resurrection – the future breaking in. It is the opposite of cynicism.
- <u>Structures of power & manipulation love cynicism</u>: Real-politik. There's no other way to get things done. In empires. In personal relations. In communities. My power has to be against yours. Ours against theirs. The Kingdom of God becomes a sect, party, us.
- In fields of knowledge & science today, hope & purpose are excluded. We choose to envision mindless world of strict mechanism, in which our own choices and thinking lose their meaning. <u>Hope is the affirmation of a vaster, open universe</u>, where our choices matter, where the things we value most are not superficial but deep at the heart of all things.
- <u>Hope says that the way things are now is not the final word</u>. We have already seen a glimpse of where things are going in Jesus. We are invited into the creative work of living, loving, creating, building, healing, welcoming, transforming for that reality we see in him. Rome has conquered many nations. Hope is for all nations across time. Jesus rules as king by serving, faithfully fulfilling promises, rising from the dead to give hope and praise.

Living Hope in Everyday Relationships

- Paul is writing into the <u>center of a hostile empire</u>. But he doesn't conspire to assassinate the emperor. He helps divided <u>people learn to live by a new reality</u>. To welcome one another. To unite across classes and ethnic divides, to share God's promises, to live in a world solid with God's faithfulness, vibrant and colorful with hope, living with direction.
- Notice that the last sentence takes us back to the themes struck at Jesus' birth joy, peace. As we trust the 'God of hope,' Jesus' reality becomes ours. But more. God's life, the Holy Spirit gives our lives power to move abundantly, creatively into a living future.