
Steadfast Love

Victory Life Church — Advent 2019

Sunday, December 1, 2019 — "Waiting With A Different Hope"

Titus 2:11-13 (ESV) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **waiting for our blessed hope**, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

We are not accustomed to waiting. We are immersed in cultures that provide what you want, when you want it. We have a near infinite amount of information and entertainment right at our fingertips with modern technology. Over years of being immersed in that kind of culture, we are conditioned to see waiting as a nuisance that makes us frustrated and even angry.

But is that the way God calls us to live?

Because we do not like waiting, and spend energy to avoid it, we come to think that we are in control of life. Yet when we are forced to wait, we get painful reminders that we are not in control.

Waiting exposes our unhealthy desire for control.

Often we try to take control, forcing our way through obstacles to get what we want when we want it. But what if being forced to wait provides us with an opportunity? What if waiting is the moment we can recognize we are not in control and that we can trust God who is in control?

Waiting challenges us to develop the trust and patience to live in God's timing.

The church for many centuries celebrated the season leading up to Christmas by marking out four Sundays that precede Christmas Day, a time of waiting in hopeful anticipation of the birth of Christ (His first advent) that acted as a way to deepen our hope and expectant waiting for his return, His second coming (advent). By practicing the hopeful waiting and anticipation for Christmas Day, so we as faithful followers of Jesus build up our excitement and patient waiting for his return when he sets the world to right.

Before the birth of Christ, Israel had centuries of promises that God would return to Israel, sending a Messiah, a savior king, who would liberate Israel from foreign oppression and restore the people of God. Israel's waiting and hoping was a long exercise in patience and trusting in God's timing. All of these promises were fulfilled in the birth, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Israel's Messiah and the Savior of the world. Just as Israel was waiting

and hoping for the coming Messiah, fulfilled in the first advent of Jesus, so we the people of God today are waiting and hoping for the second coming (advent) of Jesus.

Waiting forces us to admit that we are not in control, and invites us to yield to the One whom we trust is in control.

We celebrate the season of Advent, not just to get excited about a single day of presents and family, but as a way to pay attention to our hopes, what we are waiting for, and whom we are trusting in. Instead of cluttering our schedules with party after party, extending our budgets with present after present, frustrating our soul with boycotts and cynicism, and making the season more shallow with clichés, we live with a different hope than what culture has to offer.

Hope: a proper perspective of the future that creates a positive attitude in the present

Our hopes are not grounded in economies and politicians and elections. Our hope is in the coming of Jesus to set the world right. This is what we are waiting for. And being forced to wait now should make us pay attention to how much we are distracted from this blessed hope.

Where are your hopes?

Hope tethers us to something beyond our present feelings and circumstances

We mistakingly place our hopes in things and people and systems that will never deliver ultimate joy or final justice. We place our hopes in our jobs, companies, and economies. We place our hopes in politicians, governments, and elections, thinking that these determine the future. We place our hopes in family members, in medications, in doctors, in celebrities, but all of which are incapable of bringing about God's perfect will. We have only one true hope: Jesus Christ.

Hope is a bold proclamation that the present reality is not ultimate reality

Celebrating Advent enables us to remember that God was faithful in the past, in the first advent of Christ, and will be faithful in the end, the second advent of Christ. We place our hopes in his character. His character is that of "steadfast love".

There is a Hebrew word that is often used in the Old Testament that is very important in understanding the character of God. The word is "chesed" and it is translated many different ways into English. "Unfailing love," "mercy," "kindness," "lovingkindness," are all ways it has been translated. The English Standard Version usually translates it as "steadfast love."

Because of the many different words used to translate it, you can see that it is a challenge to capture the word into English. But one way to think of this word is in an analogy. It's like an elderly couple that have been in a loving, committed marriage for many many decades, but then in their old age, the wife suffers from dementia. She doesn't remember much of their life together anymore, forgets that she is married, forgets who her husband is, even becomes unable to take care of herself. Yet through the entire process, her husband cares for her, loves her, tends to her needs, and is tender, gentle, and sacrificial in his love for his wife despite the fact she no longer remembers their marriage or even who he is. The husband that remains

committed to his covenant with his wife with tender, sacrificial love even when she forgets their relationship and who he is, he is showing “chesed,” steadfast love.

This is the kind of love God has for us. He is tender and caring, sacrificial in his love toward us, even when we are short-sighted and selfish, even when we forget our commitment to Him. God shows this kind of steadfast love toward us even when we do not deserve it. So even when I am forced to wait, I can put my trust in Him. He is where I place my hope.

Exodus 34:6 (ESV) The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love** and faithfulness,"

Psalms 33:20-22 (ESV) Our soul **waits** for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we **trust** in his holy name. Let your **steadfast love**, O Lord, be upon us, even as we **hope** in you.

Lamentations 3:21-26 (ESV) But this I **call to mind**, and therefore I have **hope**: The **steadfast love of the Lord never ceases**; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will **hope in him**." The Lord is good to those who **wait** for him, to the soul who **seeks** him. It is good that one should **wait quietly** for the salvation of the Lord.

Psalms 130:1-8 (ESV) Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, **hope in the Lord!** For with the Lord there is **steadfast love**, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Our waiting and our hopes are anchored, not in present circumstances or feelings, they are not anchored in humans or systems, they are anchored in the character of God, his steadfast love. The closest New Testament Greek word that mirrors the Old Testament Hebrew word “chesed” is “charis”, mostly translated to English as “grace.”

Titus 2:11-13 (ESV) For the **grace** of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **waiting for our blessed hope**, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

There is another way to live, anchored in a different hope, the steadfast love of God. This is why we celebrate Advent, to remind us of what we are waiting for, who we are placing our hopes in, and in whom we trust: Jesus Christ.