

Chris Murphy

October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Scripture: Romans 8: 14-39

Sermon Title: Hope in Heaven, Hope on Earth

Romans 8:14-39

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you

did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a

spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba!<sup>[a]</sup> Father!” 16 it is that very Spirit

bearing witness<sup>[b]</sup> with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if

children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer

with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Future Glory

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing

with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager

longing for the revealing of the children of God, 20 for the creation was

subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who

subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in[c] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes[d] with groanings too deep for words. 27 And God,[e] who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit[f] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together[g] for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he

might be the firstborn within a large family.[h] 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

### God's Love in Christ Jesus

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ[i] who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? 36 As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the Word of God...

Please pray with me.

Introduction:

This morning as we continue our sermon series on hope I am drawn to ask an important question. How does our hope in heaven impact the hope we have on earth? Do you remember when you first learned about heaven and also when you first learned about the concept of hell.

For me it began at a young age. I still remember accepting Jesus into my heart at the age of six. I was in my Grandma and Grandpa Murphy's house. My grandma asked if I had accepted Jesus into my heart and I must have said something like- maybe. Then to just be sure, I had my grandma lead me in a simple prayer where I asked Jesus to forgive my sins and I accepted Jesus as

my Lord and Savior. Even as a six year old, I knew by saying this simple prayer that I would one day go to be with Jesus in heaven.

Even though I knew I was saved at six, when I was eleven years old I decided to recommit my life to Christ in two other places. I went to a Billy Graham Crusade at Jo Alby stadium in Spokane Washington and during the altar call my sister and I decided to go down to the field and recommit our lives to Jesus. I got a little track telling me how to receive Christ into my heart and I remember the prayer counselors on the football field encouraging us to keep going to church so that we would grow in our faith. The second time I recommitted my life to Christ was at summer camp also at 11 years old. It was Thursday or Friday night and the camp speaker had us take some personal time to talk to God and I remember telling Jesus I would follow him more faithfully.

After my acceptance of Jesus at six and my recommitment to Christ twice at the age of 11, I never really looked back. I assumed I was a Christian and I would go to heaven.

Growing up as an evangelical Christian in the Presbyterian Church, I believed my salvation was secure. God had chosen me. I was in good shape, part of the

winning team. As I got older and attended college and seminary, I started to have some questions. One of my questions was related to the salvation of unbelievers. What about people from other religions or those who did not know Jesus? I learned from my evangelical upbringing that people who were not Christians might end up in hell. I was told that we were not saved by good works, so even if someone was a good person if they did not know Jesus they would likely end up in hell.

In seminary I learned that there were various ideas about what hell might be. The common evangelical and charismatic understanding of hell seemed to be that it was a place of eternal torment. However, CS Lewis who I loved growing up due to his Narnia book series seemed to teach that hell was a choice people make to choose self over God and it did not necessarily mean people would be in a lake of fire or eternal torment. It might be a lonely existence separate from God but not exactly the inferno made famous by the medieval writings of Dante. Another option I learned about the after life is that people who do not go to heaven might simply experience something called annihilation where they would not live in eternal torment but would simply cease to exist. Annihilation is a common view among Seventh Day Adventist Christians. For me it seemed a little nicer than eternal torment, but still not a

great option. Another idea was that hell was more like the Catholic view of purgatory. It was a place of temporary rehabilitation, purgation, or refinement and that with the right process of healing people who wind up in hell could eventually be restored into heaven.

In recent years I have found myself curious about the idea of universal reconciliation. This doctrine states that God will ultimately bring salvation to all souls.

Why do I want to share about this topic this morning? The main reason is that I believe how we view the after life and our personal views of hell, might impact the quality of our hope on earth.

Before I share my personal opinion on what heaven and hell actually are, I want to be clear that each person is entitled to decide what you wish to believe about heaven and hell. There are plenty of people with different opinions who use Scripture, church tradition, reason, and personal experience to come up with their core beliefs on this topic. It may be comfortable for people to look to pastors to have all the answers on the question, but I think it is more appropriate for people to put their trust in God.

My goal in bringing up this topic is not that you believe what I believe, but rather than you explore this question with humility and openness.

So here is what I personally believe at this time. And I will begin by saying I do not know entirely if I am right on this topic. I feel confident on my view of heaven, but less confident in my understanding about hell.

My view of heaven begins with the idea that Jesus is our Savior and Lord and Jesus as the Son of God and as one member of the Holy trinity has somehow mysteriously made a way for the salvation of humankind and the restoration of all creation through his life, death, and resurrection.

I believe that when a person dies, she or he will stand before Jesus who is the judge of the living and the dead. Jesus will likely offer salvation to everyone, but some might struggle to receive this gift and my hope is that they will go through a journey of refinement where they are able to experience personal repentance and personal restoration. For those that have done significant evil in their lives, I imagine God will want them to do some type of penance so that they are held accountable for some of their choices, but I do not believe God will send anyone to a place of eternal torment. Frankly if God sends even people that do really evil things to a place of eternal torment then I worry that

God is just as violent in nature as we fear he might be. No, I choose to believe that God is only love and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. The world will one day experience complete restoration and all souls will be eternally restored by God's grace.

I believe heaven will be where most people end up right away when they die and those that do not enter into the bliss and beauty of heaven will go through a restoration process of refinement and healing. This view I have of hopeful universal reconciliation of all creation is also known as hopeful universalism. I am a hopeful universalist.

I believe that God created the world good and when sin entered the world God created a plan of restoration that culminated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus will one day restore all of creation and we will join in a heavenly feast. I even hope that evil itself will be restored to goodness.

Now if this sounds at all like heresy, I understand. I used to think this view was reserved for super liberal Christians. But now I am starting to realize that it is a rather common view. We just don't usually talk about our opinions on heaven and hell. May I say again that you are entitled to believe whatever you wish

about heaven and hell. I am sharing my more optimistic view for those of us who have never known we have a choice.

One of the main reasons I believe God will restore all of creation to heaven one day is because this idea makes more sense to me than the idea that God will punish people by sending them to a place of torment. If God is love then God will find a way to restore the world to shalom- peace and wholeness. God will still enable people to have free will, but God will ultimately find a way to persuade everyone to accept the grace offered to them. For some that grace might include a journey of refinement before entering heaven, but everyone will be restored to full relationship with God. I believe in the Scripture we read today, which says that nothing is able to separate us from the love of Christ. For me the idea that God will send people to hell is equivalent to the idea that a parent would choose to disown their children. It reminds me of the sad stories of fathers who disown their children when they make a mistake. For me only the most abusive parent would disown their kids even if they do bad things. God must be better than the worst humans. If we believe that God is as abusive as some human parents who punish their children by disowning them, then I worry that Christianity is in trouble.

I choose to teach a Christianity where God is judge but not judgemental in nature. I believe in a God of grace who forgives all and restores the broken wounded ones who resist her grace. I believe God will never give up on her creation. She will pursue us until we return home. God will not take away our will, but God will persuade us until we will find a way to say yes to healing and wholeness.

Oh, and heaven, what do I believe about heaven? I believe Jesus goes and prepares a place for us. I believe heaven is a place where there is no death and tears are wiped away. I believe broken bodies in heaven are made whole and our loved ones are reunited with us. I even believe that in heaven people have roles they play. Some in heaven are in some mysterious way called to care for us on earth. Heaven is the restored creation, so it is beautiful. I think it will have mountains and waterfalls and we will hang out with other people, animals, angels and with God. I believe these things about heaven because I have had visions of heaven and of angels and periodically God reminds me of the goodness of heaven. And yes, the Bible is full of insights into heaven. The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate story that tells us that one day heaven will be our home.

One final reason that I am a hopeful universalist is that this viewpoint provides hope for me on earth. If God is love and God will ultimately restore all creation into union with herself, then I can live my life on earth with integrity. I can trust that a God of love is actually real and can empower me to show love to my neighbor even when my neighbor fails to show love to me. If God is love and restores all of creation then I can trust that it is possible to love one's enemies and possibly make them one's friends. If God truly is a God of grace, hope, peace, and love then no matter what suffering happens on earth God will find a way to heal it, not through punishment but through grace and forgiveness. Love will truly have the last word. Do we dare to believe God is this good and this powerful? I choose to dare and if I am wrong then at least I was able to proclaim a God of love rather than a God of hate and damnation. Too much of Christianity these days seems to foster unnecessary hate of the other. I follow a Jesus who forgave his oppressors from the cross. I follow a Jesus who was nonviolent when he could have chosen violence. I follow a Jesus who heals the wounded.

Friends, if you need a theology of hope maybe consider the idea of hopeful universalism and if that feels too difficult to grasp, simply rest in the assurance of your own salvation. Know that a God of love forgives you and you

do not need to fear hell. Jesus has the keys to hell and just might empty it one day. The hope of an empty hell might lead to us showing love to our neighbors on earth because we will be convinced that everyone truly is a child of God.

An empty hell might also encourage us to care for God's green earth. The hope of an empty hell might convince us that God is truly love.

One appropriate question some devoted Christians might have with regards to a more positive view of heaven being the destination of everyone one day, is how might that impact efforts at evangelism on earth. In other words, why tell people about Jesus if we will all end up in heaven whether we believe in him or not? My answer to that good question is that I encourage people to have a relationship with Jesus not generally because I am worried they will end up in hell, but instead because a life with Jesus makes our lives on earth so much better. I trust Jesus will ultimately save the world from hell, but while we are on earth it is so powerful to begin our eternal relationship with Jesus right now.

Knowing Jesus has shaped my life in amazing ways. Knowing God our Mother and Father and Holy Spirit has enabled me to live with so much more direction and guidance. God has helped me become a more loving and virtuous person and has given me so many gifts. God has also empowered me to show love to vulnerable people and to care for her creation. I can't imagine life without

God. I want people to know Jesus so that they can have an incredible life and so that they can grow in love and find freedom from sin and freedom from the power of evil. For me believing that heaven will ultimately be everyone's home does not mean we stop evangelizing the world. No, we share the good news of Jesus so that people can both have the peace of knowing that heaven will be their home and so that they can be empowered to live full of love of God and neighbor on earth.

My journey to becoming a hopeful universalist has been a long one, so if you are new to this idea, take some time to reflect more upon it or talk with me. I am reading a good book by two Christian scholars called *Reconsidering Hell*. It is by Ronald Allen and Robert Cornwall. I recommend this book because it provides a good overview of different positions on hell and includes historical and Scriptural teaching on different views. I learned in this book that many early Christians theologians like Origen believed in universal reconciliation. Another recent resource I would also recommend is Robin Parry's book *The Evangelical Universalist*. In his book he makes a case that orthodox Christianity should consider hopeful universalism to be an acceptable position even if it is not the most mainstream view. I wish to add that many Catholics including the Franciscan Richard Rohr, our recent Pope Francis as

well as most Presbyterian Church (USA) pastors believe in hopeful universalism because it allows for the hope that love wins and God's love and power will ultimately be fulfilled in the restoration of all things. A couple other female spirituality writers that I admire who support some form of hopeful universalism are the Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber and Sarah Bessey. It is actually quite a popular topic in the field of spirituality.

A final reason I am hopeful about heaven and the peace that this teaching brings on earth is that I think that this perspective is helpful for people who are struggling to stay Christian. I find there is a sad trend in our world of people leaving Christian faith because it is viewed as unloving. Everyone's spiritual journey is sacred and I understand why some people look for other spiritual identities than Christian faith, but I want our church to represent a Christianity that is worth supporting in our world where too often faith creates more division than unity. At Newberg First Presbyterian Church we try to embody God's love for all and a compassionate understanding of a God who is wide in mercy and full of goodness. The Christianity we embody here will be consistent with a God who is full of grace, hope, peace, and love.

Please pray with me...