

Advent Week 1 HOPE

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Last week was actually the first week of advent, a period in the calendar where believers are encouraged to reflect on the imminent coming and significance of Christmas.

But our plans for last Sunday were interrupted by the previous week's snowstorm and subsequent shifting of our service ahead a week.

So today we take up the theme of the first Sunday of Advent, that of Hope.

Hope is a dominant theme throughout the Bible. A word search turns up multiple references to hope. The word appears far more in the Bible than any other book I have read.

And I believe that the predominance of the theme of hope in the scripture is not by accident.

I believe that God realized that each of us have a very basic need for hope. Without hope we are left with despair.

And thank God, we as followers of Jesus are offered hope in various ways.

For example, when we examine the events surrounding the first Christmas, we see that the coming of Jesus was indeed predicted by multiple Old Testament prophecies, but it also ushered in the beginning of the realization of a hope that was first offered in Genesis.

Consider the scene in the garden immediately following the sinful fall of Adam and Eve. In that moment there appeared to be no hope for mankind.

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Rebellion against God, called for a just God to punish that grave sin.

But in Genesis 3:15 God tells Satan:

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Circumstances at that moment in the garden were very bleak. Sin had entered the world, Adam and Eve were guilty of grave sin, and at that moment they were without any hope of having their sins forgiven and enjoying a restoration with a Holy God.

But in that conversation between God and Satan we find a ray of hope. Someday, sometime in the future, the descendant of Eve would strike the head of the evil one.

And from that moment on, down through the centuries of the Old Testament, hope became a persistent theme.

Hope for peace, hope for political deliverers, and hope for a life after death. A hope for a way that sins could be forgiven, a hope that restoration with God would be possible, and a hope for a place in heaven.

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The curse of sin would impact everything and everyone on the planet, the future appeared to be bleak, the potential for despair was real, but there was still hope.

Listen to Paul's words from Romans 8:21& 22:

Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

The Old Testament prophets on multiple occasions spoke about the coming of the Messiah.

They encouraged their followers to hope for his appearing.

In the same way the New Testament encourages us to live in hope of his return

In Matthew chapter twelve Jesus has been busy healing all who came to him. In verse 21 of that chapter Matthew writes this:

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***“And his name will be the hope
of all the world.”***

Hopefully you will remember that last week I encouraged you to memorize this phrase.

The arrival and miraculous ministry of Jesus began the fulfillment of the often repeated hope of a saviour. A saviour, a Messiah, the anointed one, the coming one that had been taught and prophesied by the Old Testament prophets.

A desperate hope for the people of that time.

There are many examples of desperate hope in the world today.

The Ukrainians hope for the war to end. The Kenyans are hoping for the famine to end. The Haitians are hoping for foreign intervention so that the gang violence will end.

There are many kinds of hope in our world, some desperate, some realistic, and some false.

For the person facing physical death, and we all are, it is just a matter of time, what is that person's hope?

I would like to focus on that aspect of hope for a few minutes.

Perhaps we can suggest that for each person facing death, there are three categories.

First, there are those with no hope.

Secondly, there are those with false hope.

Thirdly, there are those with a true hope.

Let's first consider those with no hope.

The Old Testament sternly warns those who are godless, those who would choose not to follow

Jehovah but rather worship the heathen gods or not worship any god at all.

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In Chapter twenty-seven verse eight Job asks an important question:

For what hope do the godless have when God cuts them off and takes away their life?

Perhaps in our time and in our culture the godless would include those who make the point that they are not religious or that they are agnostics or that they are atheists.

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And in chapter seventeen verse thirteen Jeremiah answers Job's question:

O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who turn away from you will be disgraced. They will be buried in the dust of the earth, for they have abandoned the LORD, the fountain of living water.

In the New Testament Paul also talks about those without hope.

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He is writing to the Ephesians and in chapter two verse twelve he reminds them of their spiritual status before they came to Christ.

“Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world”.

Now Paul here is talking about spiritual life.

Godless people have lots of hope. They may hope for a better job, they may hope for raise, they may hope for their favorite sports team to win.

But the hope that really counts, is the hope for sins forgiven, the hope for restoration with God, the hope for life after physical death and the hope of a place is glory.

I suppose that the best the godless could hope for, using Jeremiah's words, is that they would be buried in the dust of the earth and that would be the end.

I would think that many of the godless in our current world would hope that physical death would be the end.

They are hoping for oblivion, hoping for no day of accountability before a holy God.

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But Paul writing in Romans Chapter fourteen beginning at verse ten writes:

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So, then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

So, any good hope for the godless when death comes is non-existent.

And for the godless, for those without Christ in their lives, the scripture is clear, they simply have no hope for sins forgiven, no hope for restoration with God, no hope for life after death in heaven,

And we do well to be reminded here that without Christmas, without the incarnation, without Jesus being willing to come, willing to be born in peasant surroundings, be willing to suffer and die we would also be without hope.

Now let's consider the second category, the false hope. There are several flavours of false hope, but we will only look at a couple of them.

We have many other religions in our world. Some that suggest a heaven or paradise like that promised to believers in the Bible.

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In John 14:6 Jesus said “ *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.* ”

So, people considering other faiths or other religions have a choice to make. Where do they place their hope?

I would suggest to you that the choice should be easy.

Doesn't it make good sense to place your hope in the one who died but was resurrected on the third day as evidenced by multiple witnesses?

Doesn't that cause hope to arise in our hearts when we consider our future?

Doesn't it make sense to place your hope in the one who predicted his death, predicted his resurrection, and promised his followers that he would prepare a place for them in heaven?

And then thirdly there are those who believe in God or don't believe in God but believe that being a good person, doing good deeds, or perhaps being a regular church goer will award them a place in heaven.

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But Ephesians 2:9 (NLT) shatters that false hope:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.

Nowhere in the scriptures can we find any suggestion that good deeds as commendable as they might be, have any power to deal with our sin and the fact that as sinners we stand guilty before God.

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The hymnwriter had it correct when he wrote:

“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand”

But today we are celebrating the positive hope, the true hope we have as believers because of Christmas, because Jesus did come.

He did die, he did promise us hope.

He did promise us a home in glory! He was resurrected! He is interceding on our behalf, and he is the hope that lifts us from despair.

It is in his flight to glory that we find hope for our flight to glory!

It is in his resurrection that we find hope for our resurrection.

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The popular song says: Because he lives I can face tomorrow! Because he lives all fear is gone.

Because he has been resurrected, we hope for our resurrection.

Because he eternally lives we have a glorious hope for our eternal life.

And this glorious hope empowers us.

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First, hope gives us the ability to rejoice in problems and trials.

In Romans chapter five beginning at verse three we read:

*We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident **hope** of salvation.*

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*And this **hope** will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*

Secondly, Disease and sickness may attack us during our years here on earth but we have hope for a pain free, disease free future.

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In Romans chapter eight verse twenty-three we read this:

And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering.

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*We, too, wait with eager **hope** for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this **hope** when we were saved.*

Have you been saved? Have you asked forgiveness and been born again by the Spirit of God?

If you are saved as per God's word you have been given a glorious hope.

If you have not been saved, it is time you were, time you had this glorious hope because otherwise you have no hope for an eternal future in heaven.

Transition to communion

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For our communion scripture reading we go to I Peter chapter one beginning to read at verse 18,

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

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*God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake. Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and **hope** in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.*

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You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.

Because of Christmas and Jesus who came, the Jesus who was punished for your sin, the Jesus who allowed his blood to be shed, because of him, we celebrate our great hope on this communion day.

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