

Introduction: Covid and Hope

The experience of the Pandemic had lots of consequences for us all, but it took a toll on our hopes for quite a long time. Discouragement, disappointment, Helplessness were common.

- Anxiety and Fear about how dangerous the virus was, how easily communicated it was. Lack of masks and sanitizer in the first wave.
- Loss of jobs in the service sector, businesses going under, lawsuits over mandates.
- Social isolation to prevent spreading, leading to several other side effects
 - Depression, loneliness soared.
 - Amplification of our reliance on social media for information and connection. People began to inflame and divide on just about everything, affecting friendships, families, jobs, and politics fueled by the internet.
 - Loss of educational opportunity for children. Lack of childcare or schools open for working parents.
 - People dropping out of church, even dropping out of faith.
- For nurses, doctors the trauma of seeing ICU's overwhelmed with severely ill patients and having to put them in hallways because there's no beds. Getting sick themselves, burnout, quitting the profession. There's no one untouched in medicine by this.

One of the greatest problems in the crisis we endured was prolonged uncertainty and inability to confidently predict what's next. In several waves, we were looking for a resolution and found it out of reach due to the next wave of mutations. Compliance exhaustion eventually set in. People were weary, depressed, fearful, and angry all at once.

Hopes for a quick recovery from this crisis were dashed. Uncertainty reigned, making planning impossible. I heard many parents say, "We don't announce to the kids our plans ahead of time because we've had to cancel so often. Someone might test positive, regulations might suddenly change, etc."

Many of you have stories of real suffering over the past three years. Jobs lost, Weddings that were repeatedly postponed, or reduced to tiny gatherings, or where parents could not cross a border to attend, the inability to visit a dying loved one due to the risk of Covid exposure, funerals that could not be held, cancelled trips to visit family due to travel restrictions.

Covid took a toll on us, with lots of hopes and dreams blown up. Some are still digging out.
We could use some reflection and renewal of hope today. Which brings us to:

I The great chain of hope at Christmas

Gen. 3:15---->Gen. 15:5--->Psalm 132:11--->Jesus born in Bethlehem

Deep Time 1800 BC 1000 BC c.5 BC

God's promise of redemption after the fall.

Gen. 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Abraham’s covenant of faith with God

Gen. 15:5 And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

God’s promise that the messiah king would be a descendant of David

Psa. 132:11 The LORD swore to **David** a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.

Simeon’s witness: The hope fulfilled

Luke 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, **29** “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

God had an amazing plan—but it took a long time! What do your personal hopes look like right now?

II. Hope come in different sizes: Hope Hope HOPE

We have little hopes:

- Hope I can get to church on time!

1Cor. 16:7 For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I **hope** to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

Medium size hopes:

- Hope my favorite candidates win the election; get a promotion.

BIG HOPES:

- Hope in Christ and his Promise of Eternal Life; Hope a family member will return to Jesus; Hope I will recover from cancer; Hope I can have children.

- **Rom. 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Q: What hopes are in what buckets for you right now?

III Renewing Hope: 7 principles

1. Have a worthy Big Hope. For example:

Luke 12:18 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

- In recent years many believers have pinned their hopes on politicians and parties. But this is not where our confidence should lie.

2. Building Hope require our participation. Most Dreams require faithful planning and some effort to fulfill. Yes—we rely on God—but we also have to step forward in faith to collaborate with God’s work for us.

Phil. 2:12b-13...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

3. It’s important to grieve the loss of a hope. We are not very good at grieving even though Jesus grieved (Matt. 26:36f) and Paul counseled us to “Share the happiness of those who are happy and the sorrow of those who are sad.” (Rom. 12:15) Grieving our losses allows us to move beyond them to new hopes and dreams.

4. Allow God to revise your hopes. If we cling too much to a particular outcome, we may fail to recognize other ways God has provided to meet a dream in a different manner than expected.

Ex. the Incarnation of Christ. Everyone expected the Messiah to come and overthrow Roman rule. No one thought he’d be conceived by the Holy Spirit, born in a barn, reject political rule, or die on a cross. In fact, this is the reason the disciples struggled at times, and eventually the crowd turned against Jesus. But God had a different version of that hope in mind.

We may have to surrender one version of a dream to see other ways our hopes may be met.

5. Whatever my hope might be, remember that God is in charge of the future and is trustworthy.

Rom. 8: ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure 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.

6. Sometimes it’s not the outcome that is most important—it’s how I live with faithfully in that hope.

The Apostle Paul was imprisoned at Rome. He desperately hoped to be released, and hoped also he would be able to visit his beloved friends in the city of Philippi. But he was aware his hope was out of his hands. What was in his hands? While powerless in a cell, he had the power to choose to be faithful whatever came.

Phil. 1:20 as it is my eager expectation and **hope** that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

While we hope and dream, it's important to entrust ourselves and the future to God.

7. Lend someone hope this Christmas.

The Gospel says basically, "There's hope!" We have a big God we can turn to, bigger than our problems.

Rom.5:8 ...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

When we turn to God with faith and surrender, He is ready to meet us with open arms, no matter how we've strayed or stumbled and help us find our way. There's hope in the Cross for us all.

But sometimes we need other people to lend us hope.

Jesus did this to so many people who had lost their way. They were tax collectors, prostitutes, broken down leaders who felt unworthy such as the Apostle Peter—who lost his hope when Christ was executed, found hope again through the resurrection, but was wracked with guilt for having been cowardly as a leader during Jesus' trial. Jesus told him: "Feed my sheep" and restored him.

Some folks have felt so defeated and helpless about their lives that they cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel. They may be contemplating suicide, they may be addicted, they feel overwhelmed and hopeless. They need your listening ear, godly perspective, and compassionate affirmation of how you see them, despite their problems.

"I know you have trouble believing things will get better and feel hopeless right now. Can I lend you my hope for a little while? You've got a bright future ahead. You might not believe it right now, but I believe it. So, trust me, I know there's challenges but a better day is ahead—things will get better."

Q: Who could you lend hope to this week? If you need hope right now, who can you talk to?

Conclusion

Keeping Advent: How did Israel keep their hope alive for the Messiah?

They had lost much over the centuries. Been enslaved for 400 years in Egypt, wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, took over the promised land, built a kingdom, struggled with losing sight of God, corrupt, fell to Assyria and Babylon, were carried away into exile, returned to Jerusalem in ruins, rebuilt the city, were in turn dominated by the Greeks then the Roman empire.

One of their secrets was what we heard last week: rituals and symbols and feasts, telling the story of God's promises year after year. In the midst of their ups and downs, they kept this horizon in view—invisible to their enemies and beyond the reach of circumstance they trusted that God would win out.

In keeping with this, we've made an Advent Sunday devotional for helping us remember and keep God's fulfilling promises in view this Christmas.

Christmas and the Advent season are about big themes in God's salvation plan for this lost world. It's about Hopes for a King fulfilled in surprising ways, born in a barn to a poor couple. It's about the Love of God the Father which motivates the Incarnation. It's about angels and parents and shepherds rejoicing. And it's about the big Hope for the redemption of humanity and God's peace.

Rom. 15:13 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.