

Advent: Hope

Lamentations 3:19-25; Psalms 119:25-32; Daniel 9:24-26; Acts 1:6-8; James 5:7-11; Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 11:1-5; Luke 1:26-33; Revelation 5:1-5

Advent:

Advent is kind of like a countdown. It is a ritual of expectation specifically pertaining to a coming promise. You may use Advent calendars in your home to anticipate the coming of Christmas Day. Carrying on this tradition reminds us of how God's people anticipated the arrival of their savior. It also reminds us of how we wait in anticipation of his return. A key part of the anticipation is Hope and that is the subject I will be covering today.

Meanings:

First, let us discuss the different meanings of Hope. There's a stark difference between a hope and a wish. A wish is hoping for a specific and immediate thing. These are usually self-centered dealing with temporary items that are fleeting or as Ecclesiastes identifies them as *Hevel*.

Actual hope deals with something greater. Something more cosmic. More permanent. For example, this could be hoping for a change in how the world works, hoping for a change in others, or hoping for a specific good fate for creation itself. It can be hoping for a person (Jesus).

Read Lamentations 3:19-25. This passage in Lamentations is not wishing for something pleasant. In fact, things are not pleasant. But Jeremiah still hopes for God because he trusts that God is good.

Biblical Themes of Hope:

First stopping in Psalms we can find more examples of how good can be anticipated in the presence of misery and how waiting on God can be seen as a blessing.

Read Psalms 119:25-32. Here in this Psalm, there is clearly sorrow, but the ask is not for deliverance from said sorrow. The hope is for God to strengthen us such that we can overcome sorrow. It hopes for improvement instead of relief. Strength instead of comfort. Not a wish, a hope.

So there's clearly a biblical theme of hoping despite misery, but I also want to address a biblical theme of the dangers of hoping for something specifically. Because there were authors that had wishes thinking it was a just and cosmic hope.

In the book of Daniel chapter 9, Daniel is currently living in exile after his nation has been destroyed. He's going through this conversation and a sequence of visions with God. Eventually Daniel's emotions get the better of him and he pleads with God to know how long God's people will be in exile. God's response is not what he expected.

Read Daniel 9:24-26. So what's this Angel getting at? Well the weeks that it speaks of are years. Seven sets of 7 years. 62 sets of 7 years. Put simply, the angel was telling Daniel that God's Temple would not be rebuilt until 49 years in the future, and that the coming Savior would

show up after 482 years. And then, said Savior would perish and a bunch of wars would break out. In other words, rebuilding is coming but not on your timing. The Savior is coming, but He will not restore the world in a way that you expect. We'll address more on this prophecy later, but I want to hover over the theme of your hope and your expectations and how they are at odds.

Confusion:

It is important not to confuse your hope with your expectations. It is good to hope for good over evil, but hoping for good on your terms leads to entirely unnecessary disappointment. You can cause yourself to lose heart or even faith because your expectations of fulfillment surpassed your hope for actual good. We've already discussed Daniel's disappointment. But the Disciples themselves had their own expectations.

Read Acts 1:6-8. The Disciples were looking for a political restoration of their nation, but instead, Jesus told them that the timing for this wasn't up to them, instead they would spread His love to the ends of the Earth. The Disciples expected one thing, but got another. That which was delivered was good, but it's not what they wanted.

This is where we find a divergence when it comes to hope. The most underrated quote from Star wars is this: Your attitude determines your reality.

Everyone hopes, who are you hoping for? Are you hoping for a specific outcome for yourself? Or do you hope in the name of something or someone greater? We have to guard our hearts at this point. Why guard your heart? Because your heart guides what you hope for and what you hope for guys what you work toward. You may hope for a specific good change in the world that you deem as a way to care for others, but it turns out to be a wish of yours.

You need to examine your heart at this juncture. Specific hopes for specific changes are specified by something. That's something is your personal investment in the matter. Your bias. You could be personally invested in hoping for the medical recovery of a loved one. That is a wish of yours. It is a good wish but a wish nonetheless. It represents your personal investment in that other person and what they mean to you. Your personal, even selfish investment, is guiding your hope for others.

You could have hope in a law passing or a verdict being issued because it would justify your own past decisions. That is a wish of yours. It represents your personal stake in the discussion and how it affects you specifically. Your personal investment guides the hope that you have for others.

You could hope that the Messiah roll some heads and re-establish your nation when He finally shows up. Like the disciples did.

You can hope that your nation is restored within your lifetime like Daniel did.

The trick is to Hope without stipulating the delivery of this hope. Without specifics. Simply to hope for good because you have faith that God is good and not to dictate what that realized hope would look like, lest ye miss it. Hope for good because he is good, and accept the realization of that hope regardless of the form it takes. Accept the good.

James had a good take on the proper concept of hope. Read James 5:7-11. Hope is patient. Hope is knowing of the coming good. It's not necessarily knowing how it comes about. It is speaking of this patient kind of hope that brings me back to the Christmas season. Being patient for God to deliver on what is good, and not really knowing what that looks like.

The Actual Hope (Old Prophecy and New Prophecy):

Read Isaiah 9:2-7 and Isaiah 11:1-5. These writings from the prophet Isaiah told of a coming savior who would restore creation to the father. This figure would be from the line of Jesse. And what this figure did would alter the entire world for the good forever.

Then, in the Gospels, we see the prophecy fulfilled. Read Luke 1:26-33. For millennia, God's people waited for the figure that was meant to restore creation to the father. For millennia, they waited and developed expectations for what this figure would be and how this figure would act. And when it finally came to pass, a good deal of them simply could not reconcile the delivered hope with the expected wish.

As we celebrate the Advent of the season this December, let us remember the anticipation that surrounded Jesus's birth. But also let us remember how our hope was delivered in a way that was not expected. If we are to hope for something, let us simply hope that God's will is done above our will, that God's understanding be known above our own understanding. Let us lay down our own expectations and our own will in anticipation, in hope, that God has something greater for us than our own wishes. And let us lay our own will so that we do not miss out when God delivers on what we have hoped for in a way that we did not expect.

Hope for the Future:

Read Revelation 5:1-5. The scroll represents: a divine decree containing God's plan for the world, a title deed to the earth, God's plan for judgment and redemption. It is sealed and is only to be opened by someone who is worthy.

John weeps because no human has been found worthy to break the seal and read the scroll. It is a crisis that only God can resolve.

Advent is a time of anticipation. We look to the prophecies of the Old Testament to try to understand the longing and hope that they provided to God's people. The birth of Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. They began the redemptive work of God bringing humanity back to Himself

But - the work is not yet finished. Just like the Israelites, we have prophecies that provide us hope for the future fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. In Revelation 5, John writes about the hope we have to look forward to: The return of the Lion of Judah, the root of Jesse. The One who was written about in the ancient texts. The One who provided hope then and still provides hope for us today. He is God with us: Emmanuel.

Reflection Questions:

- What helps you identify whether your desire is rooted in self-interest or in a trust in God's goodness?
- Psalm 119 shows that hope often asks for strength, not escape. What situations in your life require strength instead of relief?
- When has God answered a prayer in a way that you didn't expect? How did you respond?
- How can you guard your heart so that your expectations do not overshadow your ability to recognize God's good work?
- What expectation might you need to surrender in order to truly hope in God?