



HOPE

ADVENT | Week 1

Hope is a word we hear often during Christmas or the Advent season. It is important to make sure that our understanding of this powerful word is correct because the New Testament idea of hope is very different from the way the world thinks about hope.

We might hear someone say, “Will the Cowboys win the championship this year?” And someone will respond, “I don’t know, I hope so!” Someone might stop and ask, “Do you think it will snow on Christmas Day?” And often the reply will be, “I’m not sure, but I hope so.” Hope is commonly thought of as a desire for some future event or circumstance that we cannot be certain will come to pass. But that is not the way the New Testament speaks about hope.

Titus 1:2 “...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.”

Hebrews 3:6 “...but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”

Hebrews 6:11 “...And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end...”

We have a fully assured hope because it based on a God who never lies. We have a fully assured hope because it is based on the faithfulness of God’s Son, not ours. We have a fully assured hope because of the countless saints that have gone before us.

Christmas Priorities

“And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”

Romans 13:11 (NIV)

How would your Christmas plans change if you knew Christ would return on December 25, 2019? Would His arrival affect which Christmas parties you attend? Which family members you spend time with? Which gifts you need to purchase? How you write your end-of-the-year Christmas letter to your friends and family?

As believers, we know Christ will return. We also know that we should live as if His return is near. But we’ve been waiting for a long time and while we continue to believe He will come, it doesn’t seem likely that it will happen any time soon. Paul likens this mentality to spiritual slumber and warns of its negative impact.

Romans is written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. Paul did not plant this church but received news that the church was flourishing. He very much desired to visit but was frustrated in his plan. So he wrote them a letter instead, the majority of which was designed to put them on a correct theological foundation regarding the basis of salvation—namely that salvation is a gift of God, not of works.

“... salvation is
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In God’s sovereignty, it would be this letter that would become the basis of the Protestant Reformation a thousand years later as Luther meditated on Romans 1:17, “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

In chapters 12-15 of Paul's letter, he turns from laying a theological foundation to focus on practical application. He likely felt that a church in Rome was somewhat vulnerable. Not only had he not visited the church, but they were geographically distant from the birthplace of the Church, Jerusalem. There was also a growing time distance from the birth, life, death, and resurrection of their Savior. And finally, the culture of Rome was deceptively spiritual and focused on indulging the flesh even in the pursuit of religion.

Paul warns the Romans to wake up spiritually and be prepared for the return of Christ. Remaining in a state of slumber and adopting the spirit of inertia gives us a false sense of safety. Dabbling in the dark deeds listed in verse 13—carousing, drunkenness, immorality, debauchery, dissension, jealousy—sounds like the culture's definition of the holidays, doesn't it?

Paul reminds us to hang on because our salvation is not complete. We were saved—justification—when we trusted Christ for our salvation. We are being saved—sanctification—in this life as the Father conforms us to the image of His Son. We will be saved—glorification—when Christ returns and we are united with Him eternally. It is this third sense of salvation that Paul refers to in verse 11: "...our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

Maintaining a wakeful state and reminding ourselves that Christ is coming helps us put aside the deeds of darkness listed above. Who wants to be caught in any of those activities if Christ were to suddenly show up?

So have yourself a merry little Christmas. But as you plan to celebrate the first coming, leave plenty of room for the second.

Prayer

Father, thank you for sending your Son. We celebrate His birth this season. As we do, keep us mindful that He is coming again soon. May that impact our thoughts and actions, not just at Christmas, but throughout the year. Amen.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. If you knew Christ was coming back on December 25th, what changes would this make to your holiday plans? What would Christmas day look like?
2. Duke Ellington is quoted as saying "I don't need more time, I need a deadline." What do you think he meant and how might that apply to living like Christ's return is near?

3. Paul uses the concept of spiritual wakefulness to illustrate the impact of living expectantly of Christ's return. One of the current virtues of secular culture is being "woke," which means being sensitive to social injustice. How does Paul's sense of being awake in Romans 13 correspond (or not) with the culture's sense of being "woke"?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. How would you spend Christmas Eve if you knew Jesus was coming on Christmas day?
2. Name three things you can do before Christmas to express your love for your neighbors.

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

