



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.

Be On Guard

*“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore *stay awake*—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.*

*And what I say to you I say to all: *Stay awake.*”*

Mark 13:33-37 (ESV, emphasis added)

So there we were, sitting with nervous excitement waiting for the action to be unleashed.

The crowd jumped as a boom shook the air and artillery rounds answered one another across the field. Green plumes of smoke slowly snaked through the air, testing the nerves of the anxious observers. Soon, figures appeared. First one man, then ten emerged—camouflaged, armed, and cautiously following their commanding officer.

Like a scene from a movie, the crowd watched in anxious anticipation, their stomachs tightening over what would come next during this “shock and awe” weapons display. Few were prepared to feel as they did on this particular day. After all, this was not a mission-turned-nightmare-trip to Syria; this was a graduation

ceremony from Army Basic Training in Fort Benning, Georgia—a surprising place for lessons on what it means to be “on guard” and “awake!”

Jesus often taught important lessons to His disciples when they least expected it and used striking and memorable images. In Mark 13—known as the Olivet Discourse—Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives with Peter, James, John, and Andrew looking across the great Kidron Valley toward the temple. Instead of glorying with His disciples in its “wonderful stones” and towering beauty (v. 1), Jesus instead offered them a lesson in eschatology, foretelling the coming day of destruction for not only the temple and all of Jerusalem, but for the entire unbelieving world.

In the passages that follow, the Light of the World foretold of a time when the earth would be consumed by darkness (vv. 3-32). During this time, sin would be darker than any other time in history. Man would fight to destroy man, the forces of the natural world would fight to destroy man, and the Antichrist would fight to destroy all. The only ones who would be saved from destruction would be the believers who were awake and on guard. But, no one can know when this great Day of the Lord will come (v. 32).

Jesus then told a story to help His disciples understand why this matters. A master goes on a journey and puts his doorkeeper on guard to protect his estate, commanding him to “stay awake” and await his return, which could be at any time of the day or night. That means sleep is not an option. Likewise, Jesus’ command to be on guard and awake was not optional. In fact, it was repeated *three times* in these five verses for emphasis.

Thankfully, this is not a command to a constant physical state of alertness. Only “He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:4). Other passages of Scripture help us understand that for believers, staying awake is a call to a *spiritual alertness* and a rousing to action in strength that only comes from the Lord.

God-given strength is described throughout Scripture as a “garment” or piece of clothing. The prophet Isaiah cries, “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments” (Isa. 52:1). These powerful images are meant to convey a powerful truth: God gives His image-bearing children weaponry that ensures victory over the spiritual forces of darkness that daily battle against us.

During the holiday season, it is right for us to ponder and celebrate the *First Advent: the first coming of God the Son to the earth*. The First Advent reflects the first half of the gospel message: because of God’s love for us, He sent His only begotten Son into this sinful world! But some may honestly wonder, why did Jesus need to be sent to the earth?

“... because of God’s love for us, He sent His only begotten Son into this sinful world!”

The *Second Advent: the Second Coming of God the Son to the earth* answers this question. The Second Advent reflects the second half of the gospel message: God sent His Son into the world to rescue us from the certain destruction that will come from His judgment of sinners. Mark 13 reminds us that His judgment is coming for every person and that we don't know when it will come, so we must be ready! We must be ready and prepared to die, and we must also be ready and prepared to live!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I praise You for you have come and You will come again! Thank You, Lord my God, for saving me from destruction by calling me to faith in Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, which indwells me and gives me the hope of glory that will come. But until that day, Lord, open my eyes as I meditate on your Word. Let me always be clothed in Your holy garments of truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, and faith. Give me confidence that Your Holy Spirit will guide the words of my mouth and the work of my hands so that in both living and in dying, I will bring glory to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. Are you prepared to die? If not, pray for the salvation of the Lord through faith in Jesus.
2. Are you prepared to live? What are some things you can do to be spiritually awakened?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. What is the message of the gospel?
2. What is the First Advent and how does it reflect the first half of the gospel message?
3. What is the Second Advent and how does it reflect the second half of the gospel message?

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

