



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.

The Hope of Days to Come

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Jeremiah 33:14-16 (ESV)

What makes you hopeful this time of year? Is it the assurance of colder weather or the chance to rest after a hectic school year? Is it the traditions that will be carried on, gifts that will be opened, or memories that will be made this Christmas? Maybe your hope lies instead on the promise of a new year and a new beginning after a season filled with pain and disappointment.

To hope is to “cherish a desire with anticipation” or to “want something good to happen or be true.” Hope is not just a hallmark of the Christmas season, but the very anchor of our faith (Heb. 11:1). It is the emotional reservoir that propels us to walk through seasons of uncertainty; without it, our spirits become downcast, and discouragement quickly sets in.

“Hope is not just a hallmark of the Christmas season, but the very anchor of our faith.”

By the time we reach Jeremiah 33:14-16, the people of Judah were on the verge of hopelessness. For nearly 50 years, Jeremiah had warned of divine

judgment that would come if the people persisted in chasing after false gods. Now, his prophecy had come to pass.

The armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon were quickly closing in. Within a matter of months, the streets of Jerusalem would be filled with the victims of war and the great temple of Solomon would be reduced to rubble. Those who survived the bloodshed would be carried away by the enemy and forced to remain as exiles in Babylon for the next 70 years.

The people of Israel had no security, no safety, no control, and no way to escape their enemies. With their lives in shambles and their futures uncertain, they would have longed for a time when relief would come, for a ray of hope to shine through the darkness of their desperation.

Perhaps you can relate.

In verse 14, God breaks through the Israelites' (and our) fearful realities with words of promise about the future: "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the promise I made..." This "promise" refers back to Jeremiah 29:10, when God assured His people that He would eventually bring them "back to this place" (Jerusalem) after their time of exile.

The words that followed this hope-filled promise are some of the most often quoted in all of Scripture: "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11, emphasis added). God is telling His people that their despair will not last forever; the time will come when He will fulfill His promise to restore them, physically and spiritually. Until then, they are called to trust Him.

“Since the moment God spoke of His promise... God’s people have hoped for a Savior.”

Verse 15 goes on to state God’s greatest promise to Israel—the promise of a “righteous Branch,” a King-Messiah that would emerge from David’s line to rule and reign on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:8-17). A similar image is found in Isaiah: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit” (Isa. 11:1). Both images depict a restored hope for the future: new life emerging from what appeared to be a dead stump.

Since the moment God spoke His promise of a “seed” to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18, God’s people have hoped for a Savior—One who could forgive their past, redeem their present, and secure their future.

In this passage, God says that “seed” will become the Branch that brings the coveted blessings of salvation, security, justice, and righteousness to the earth.

Through this promised One, God's people would experience a physical (and more importantly, spiritual) rescue and restoration. Through Him, they would be called righteous.

As they sensed the enemy advancing, these were the promises Israel clung to. This was their hope.

Today, God's people are given a different perspective. Whereas Israel was looking ahead to the fulfillment of these promises, we look back on them. We know that God kept His Word. Just as He promised, Judah returned from exile in Babylon at the end of 70 years. The people eventually rebuilt the war-torn walls of Jerusalem as well as the temple and, thereafter, a great spiritual revival occurred in Israel (Ezra 6; Neh. 11-12).

Most importantly, God kept His promise to send this Righteous Branch—His own Son, Jesus Christ. Through Him, our enemy—Satan—is defeated. Death is conquered, and those who believe in Him can dwell securely in His hands knowing our sins have been forgiven and our souls have been saved. God kept his promise to send us a Savior, and through Him, we are called righteous.

For the Church today, these are the promises we cling to. This is our hope.

The Advent season is not simply a countdown to December 25th, but a compass that directs our hope. While the world is waiting to open gifts, longing for the thrill of Christmas morning, and anticipating a better, brighter new year, the Church waits for the day of Christ's return, longs for the hope of Heaven, and anticipates a future of peace, love, wholeness, and mercy with the coming of a new millennium.

“Behold, the days are coming...”

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. Review Jeremiah 33:14-16. What specific promises does the Lord make to Israel? How do we see God's grace (unmerited favor toward mankind) on display in this passage?
2. How would you define a believer's "hope," and how is this different from the type of hope held by the world?
3. What kinds of things can cause our hope to become derailed, even as believers in Christ? How can fixing our hope on the Lord (Ps. 130:5-7), rather than on people or things, guard against discouragement and disappointment?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. Psalm 130:7 tells God's people to "hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him there is plentiful redemption." What do you think it means to have "hope" in the Lord?
2. In Jeremiah 33, the Israelites had disobeyed and turned away from God, but God still promised to send them a Savior who would one day rescue them from their enemies and bring them to safety. He promised to save them even though they hadn't (and couldn't) do anything to earn His forgiveness or love. We call this "grace"—receiving something good from God that you don't deserve.

Read the passages below aloud.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast...For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:4-9; Romans 6:23

What do these verses tell us about God? How is He described? What "gifts" does the Lord offer us that other people or things cannot? Why are these gifts better than anything we could hope for this Christmas?

3. How does the gift of your salvation give you hope for the future, rather than fear or discouragement?

Listen to | *"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"*

by Edward Mote (1834)

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus Christ, my 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,
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;

In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
In Him, my righteousness, alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

