



1st Sunday in Advent - Hope

November 28, 2004

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Introduction:

As we conclude our month of thanksgiving, we move into the season of Advent. Our focus and theme for this morning is HOPE.

A number of years ago researchers performed an experiment to see the effect hope has on those undergoing hardship. Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers left one set in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned. The other rats were periodically lifted out of the water and then returned. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours. Why? Not because they were given a rest, but because they suddenly had hope!

Those animals somehow hoped that if they could stay afloat just a little longer, someone would reach down and rescue them. If hope holds such power for unthinking rodents, how much greater should its effect be on our lives.

Hope is one of the three virtues that are mentioned in **1 Corinthians 13:13**.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Hope is different from love and faith because it is directed toward the future in a fervent desire and confident expectation. When hope has attained its object, it stops being hope and becomes possession.

Hope is defined as something that is cherished with anticipation. We desire with the expectation of obtaining. We expect with confidence.

Hope is an essential and fundamental element of Christian life, so essential that it speaks of the essence of Christianity all by itself.

Everything about being a Christian is centered in this aspect of hope. Those who do not believe are without this hope. The actual object of the believers hope is Christ Himself. It is in His second coming that the hope of glory will be fulfilled. This hope is something that is alive. It is not frail and perishable, but has life.

Romans 8:24-25 - For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

This is what the advent season is all about – *hope*. The spirit behind this season is one of anticipation and expectation. It is a longing for deliverance. This longing started for the Jewish people in Egypt and continues to the present time. Have you ever longed for someone who would come and make things right, Someone who could deal justly with injustice, Someone who could turn things around, Someone who would deliver from the wickedness of our own hearts? That is what the people of Israel longed for. They longed for a deliverer who would set them free.

Hope was something that the Jewish people displayed in anticipation of the coming Messiah. They had heard prophecies for centuries that Christ was coming.

Listen to some of them

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 11:10

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious

Micah 5:2

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

But advent is far more than simply marking a 2,000 year old event in history. It is celebrating a truth about God, the revelation of God in Christ whereby all of creation might be reconciled to God. Today we are longing and waiting for Christ's second coming. There is no mistake He will come again. Listen to some of the words from scripture that give us hope.

1 John 3:2-3

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

John 14:28

You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

Hebrews 9:28

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The acknowledgement that Christ came in the flesh, that He lives among us today by the spirit and that He will come back again in power, provides a basis for holy living. We are to be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us. So as God's people we celebrate the Incarnation, and anticipate His future return.

Anticipating something can be either pleasant or unpleasant. The expectation can be enjoyable, but the time spent waiting often is not too much fun. I can remember as a child waiting and the anticipation for Christmas to come. It seemed as though it took forever. Now that I'm older it comes all too quickly. There was the hope that the gift you wanted beyond anything else would be under the Christmas tree. Such anticipation! Such expectation!

That is the kind of desire that we as believers hold in our hearts. It is the desire for a King who will rule with truth and justice and righteousness over His people and His creation. It is that hope of the Anointed One, the Messiah, who will bring peace and justice and righteousness to the world. That is what we are anticipating.

So let's begin this season of Advent, searching our own hearts to see how much we really desire our Deliverer to come back. How much do we really long for His return? Are we so in love with this world and its systems that we hear the prophecy that He will come again and think that's nice, but we hope it happens long after we have died? Or "that's a nice thought, but I hope it won't happen too soon."

Scriptures indicate that His return will be when it is least expected. Jesus is coming again. So cling passionately to these promises that Christ will come and deliver His people.

While we wait and anticipate that event happening, here are some other words of hope for those who this morning may need them.

Scriptures indicate hope.....

I. For those who are in darkness – the anticipation of seeing

Several years ago my parents and sister and I went to visit Howe Caverns in New York. To take the tour, one has to ride an elevator 156 foot into the earth to get to the cave. At one point just before the tour starts, all the lights are turned out. It is so dark that you lose all perspective of space and direction. You can not see your hand in front of your face. It is PITCH BLACK. There is hope for those who may be in a place of darkness. Not able to see which way is up or out, nor to be able to see anyone to guide you.

John 12:46

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

2 Cor. 4:6

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

II. For those who are lost – the anticipation of being found

A few years ago I traveled to New York to visit family over Thanksgiving. While there I thought it would be nice to take a side trip. Brian and I went down to New York City and it was at night. We had a map, and I wanted him to see the Statue of Liberty. Actually we drove down past the ENRON building, but we got lost. When one realizes they are lost it can be pretty hopeless. Remember when you were in a store as a child and wandered away from mom or dad. When you tried to find them, you were all turned around? It's that realization that we come to – trying to find our way and realizing we are away from God.

John 14:6

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

III. For those who are sick – the anticipation of being healed

There are some who have come here this morning hoping for healing. Maybe there is a physical need, or perhaps there is an emotional hurt and you are tired of being sick. You need a physician who will help you recover and will make you whole. Jesus is your hope. He was there when you were made. He knows every minute detail of how you function, and He is the Lord of your body and your health.

Psalm 103:3

...who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

Psalm 147:3

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

IV. For those who are bound – the anticipation of freedom

There may be some here this morning that are bound. You can not seem to get free of that habit, of that sin, of that thing that controls you. Maybe it is your appetite for food, for drugs, for alcohol, for sex, for power. Maybe it's your anger, your attitude, your speech. You have hope in Jesus for freedom. The Power of the Holy Spirit has been offered to those who will seek Him. There are things that we do when we are released from bondage, and there are things that someone else has to do for us. Ask Christ to free you.

Luke 4:18 -19

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

V. Hope for those who die in Christ – the anticipation of resurrection

All of us at some time have experienced the death of a loved one. Several of our brothers and sisters in Christ just recently have experienced walking through that valley of the shadow of death. There is hope. A resurrection is coming. Those who have

fallen asleep in Jesus will be raised to an incorruptible body. We have hope we will be with Christ and with those who have followed Him.

John 11:25

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

Part of the expectation also anticipates a judgment on sin and a calling of the world to accountability before God. We long for God to come and set the world right! Yet, as the prophet Amos warned, the expectation of a coming judgment at the “Day of the Lord” may not be the day of light that we might want, because the penetrating light of God’s judgment on sin will shine just as brightly on God’s people.

Conclusion:

So, we celebrate with gladness the great promise in the Advent, yet knowing that there is also a somber tone as the theme of threat is added to the theme of promise. But this is also faithful to the role of the Coming King who comes to rule, save, and judge the world.

Because of the dual themes of threat and promise, Advent is a time of preparation that is marked by prayers of submission, prayers for deliverance, and prayers from those walking in darkness who are awaiting a great light!