Series: The Voices of Advent

Message: “Isaiah, the Prophet”

Text: Isaiah 9:6-7

Theme: Hope

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Location: Christ Community EFC

I enjoy celebrating Advent as part of my Christmas celebration.

You see, our world has commercialized Christmas so much so that what used to be a fairly sacred time of year is now only talked about in terms of company profits, consumer spending, Hollywood blockbuster movies, TV events, finding the right gift or buying the newest gadget on the market, and 24 hour/7 “holiday” music.

Even those of us who still celebrate CHRISTmas, the birth of our Savior, we too can get “wrapped up” in all of the commercialism and the business.

But Advent causes us to stop – and it allows us to relax, and to focus, rest, meditate, and celebrate the birth of Christ.

During this first week of Advent our focus is on hope.

But what is HOPE? Hope is such a misunderstood word – we use hope as word that carries much uncertainty – “I hope the Steelers win the Super Bowl” or “I hope we can build a multi-purpose ministry addition on the church one day.”

But our hope – the way we use the word – is not the same way the Bible speaks of hope.

The Bible speaks of hope as something that is certain to happen because God said it would happen – what we call a “confident expectation”.

Hope is closely related to faith. Faith is trusting in and acting on what God has said.

Hope is similar, in that it also trusts in what God has said, but there is a unique and powerful difference.

Here is an example of faith. The Bible says in Matthew 6:33 “…**seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [**In context, everything you need**] will be added to you**.”

What is the instruction? Make God’s kingdom your primary pursuit and what…? These words of Christ hold a great promise, don’t they?

Pursue God first, and all your needs will be taken care of. This promise requires faith. Any promise upon which you can act and bring a result requires faith.

Now lets look at an example of hope. Turn in your Bible please to Isaiah chapter 9, Isaiah chapter 9 and we will skip down to verses 6 and 7.

You may remember, Isaiah prophesized almost 700 years before the birth of Christ. Yet more about the person and work of Christ is found in the book if Isaiah than in any other book of the Old Testament.

The job of the prophet in the Old Testament was to deliver God’s message to God’s people. And more times than not, God’s message always included a judgment that was about to befall His people because of their sin and rebellion against God.

And because no one like to have someone point out their sins, as you can imagine, prophets were generally not liked very much.

In fact tradition says that Isaiah was martyred by being sawed in two inside a hollow log.

Isaiah’s prophetic ministry began shortly after the Babylonians had taken the 10 northern trips captive. And Judah looked to be next.

Though Isaiah’s message has the warning and judgments parts, he also points out that that God always has a remnant of believers through whom He works.

And Isaiah speaks of God’s grace and His salvation for sinners. And he speaks of God’s ultimate redemptions of His people.

Listen to the promise of this ultimate salvation: Isaiah 9:6-7 “**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this**.

This is a promise of God that has been partially fulfilled, right?

A child was born! But He has not yet set up His kingdom completely.

The government doesn’t rest on His shoulders, and He does not currently rule over all the earth.

I know, ultimately God is in sovereign control over everything. But right now, because of sin, Satan, and rebellion to God’s rule are the order of the day, Christ does not reign in the hearts of all people.

One day Christ will return and this promise will be completely fulfilled.

But what about today? Is any part of this is a promise to you and me? Is there an action that you can take on this promise? There is none.

So what is my response to this promise is HOPE – I confidently expect that the Lord will bring about what He says.

Hope is “confident expectation” – hope says, “One day, Jesus Himself will return and fix this world’s mess!

Hope is confident expectation of the fulfillment of promises. The fulfilment of these promises are not based upon what I do but only on what God will do. So hope requires that I wait upon the Lord.

A promise with action requires my faith while a promise with no action requires hope – my confident expectation.

Sometimes, no matter how much we believe and trust, the promises of God things don’t happen when we want them too.

No amount of faith can bring about the promises of God on your terms, in your timing.

Still, there is great strength and freedom that HOPE can give to us.

To start Advent (what does Advent mean? Coming), I want us to see how HOPE can make us stronger and empower us.

The first week of Advent is a time for us to remember that the Jews for thousands of years held onto the hope of the Messiah coming, and that Hope was fulfilled at Jesus’ birth.

That pushes us to confidently look, as Paul reminds us in Titus 2:13, to look forward with hope “**waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**…”

The first Advent (the birth of Christ) makes us look forward with hope and anticipation to the 2nd Advent (His future return).

Since God followed through with His promise the first time, He WILL DO SO AGAIN when Jesus comes back!

Israel’s hope was the first Advent; our hope is the 2nd Advent.

But is hope practical? Why is hope important to you today?

You might be thinking, “Great, Pastor - God’s promise was fulfilled when Jesus came. Now what?”

Let me suggest to you 4 ways HOPE makes you stronger:

1. Hope motivates you to keep looking forward - expectantly.

Hope reminds us that the future is so much brighter because one day every knee will bow before God (Phil. 2:10).

Hope is your motivation to **not** let today’s worries, hurts, frustrations, or temptations become the focus of your life.

Keep looking forward; keep praying “May Your kingdom come soon, Lord!”; keep asking God to do His work in the world, in you life, and in the lives of you loved ones.

Bill Hybels, a well-known pastor and author, wrote about an experience He had after a baptism service in his church.

He wrote: “I bumped into a woman in the stairwell who was crying. I thought this was a little odd, since the service was so joyful. I asked her if she was all right.

She said, ‘No, I’m struggling.’ She said, ‘My mom was baptized today. I prayed for her every day for almost 20 years.

The reason I’m crying is because I came this close to giving up on her.

At the 5-year mark I said, “Who needs this? God isn’t listening.”

At the 10-year mark I said, “Why am I wasting my breath?”

At the 15-year mark I said, “This is absurd.”

At the 19-year mark I said, “I’m just a fool.”

But I just kept trying, kept praying. Even with weak faith I kept praying.

Then she gave her life in Christ, and she was baptized today. I will never doubt the power of prayer again.”

HOPE UNDERSTANDS THAT IF ALL I CAN DO IS PRAY AND WAIT, THAN THAT IS WHAT I WILL DO AND I **WILL** BELIEVE THAT THE LORD WILL HEAR ME AND RESPOND!

Hope keeps looking forward. Where’s your hope today? Do you even have the hope of hope?

What has God said He will do, WHAT or WHO has He burdened you to pray for that you need to recommit yourself to today?

Hope is so practical and empowering, and there is a second way that hope makes you stronger:

2. Hope encourages you with the fact that God isn’t done working yet.

Isaiah’s prophecies, and in particular from the passage we have focused on today, was a reminder to Israel that although the world around them was violently coming against them, and there was war, desolation, destruction, hunger, and pain, God had not forgotten them and there was hope for a better world coming.

This was their Hope – “a son is given – He will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace – His rule will never end”.

It it almost as if God was saying, “Don’t give up no matter how bad it looks! I am not done working!”

We need that reminder too, don’t we? How bad is your world looking right now? Are the finances hurting; is school difficult; is your future path not lining up like you thought it would; are your children rebelling; is your job a mess; are you struggling with your ex-spouse; is your health declining?

Hope is your message today – KNOW WITH CONFIDENCE THAT GOD ISN’T DONE WORKING YET!

Phil. 1:6, a verse that points us to the 2nd Advent, gives us hope as Paul writes: …**I am sure of this, that he** [that is God] **who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ**.”

Hope is empowering, isn’t it? It helps us look forward, it reminds us that God is far from done in His work, but there is a third way that it makes you stronger:

3. Hope frees you from always trying to make things happen.

It’s not about my power! Say that with me – “It’s not about my power!”

There are promises that aren’t contingent upon my action, just upon my hope – my confident expectation.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the believers in Rome. In Romans 8:37 Paul writes; “…**in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us**.

In other words Paul is saying that you are an overwhelming conqueror.

Pretty cool, right?

Do you realize that when Paul wrote that, he never said you are overwhelming conqueror because you are so strong or so faithful or so loving or so effective in service?

He wrote that you are an overwhelming conqueror through the love and power of Jesus Christ.

In other words, you are AN OVERWHELMING CONQUEROR BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD DOES, NOT BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU DO!

Tell the person sitting next to you “It’s not about your power!”

We need to let HOPE free us from always trying to make things happen on our own – there are just some things that are left up to God and you need to trust and expect HIM to bring it about.

I love what Isaiah prophesies in 9:7 – the very last phrase – “**The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this**.”

It’s not MY passionate commitment that will make God’s promises come – it’s not my passionate action or preaching or counseling or service or ability or anything!

I am FREE to walk in HOPE because“**The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this**!”

Let the freedom of that statement empower you today, and renew your confident expectation in the Lord to do all the things that you cannot do.

When God’s ready, He’ll make it happen!

Let me give you one more way that HOPE empowers you to live:

4. Hope forces you to honestly evaluate your walk.

Ask yourself this question - do I trust God’s word because I can make things happen when I act out in faith?

What happens to my confidence in God when all I can do is wait for God to deliver?

We hate to wait, don’t we? We hate to think that there are situations in which we are incapable of making something happen.

And in this first week of Advent and focusing on Hope, we need to honestly evaluate our walk – is your confidence in God strong even when you can’t do a darn thing but wait?

When Isaiah made this prophecy, there were those in Israel who received what he said and those who did not.

This prophecy was an encouraging word during a discouraging time.

The nation was headed towards enemy captivity because as a whole it had rejected God.

But there was a remnant of people who still followed God, and this prophecy is given to them to keep looking for deliverance even though everything is currently going wrong.

This remnant had to go through the bad times just like everyone else, but they had HOPE – “a child is born, a son is given.”

Isaiah would later go on to prophesy to this remnant who kept on hoping, confidently believing that God would do what He said.

Isaiah told them this in Isaiah 40:31: “**those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint**.”

Being refueled by HOPE today will allow you to soar, to be renewed, to be relieved of weariness and to walk without stopping.

Will you walk in hope?