

Advent Hope

We've celebrated Thanksgiving, decorations are in place, and we are looking forward to Christmas. The Church through the ages has called this season **Advent**, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. The word *Advent* in *our words* might be best translated **showing up**.



With Advent we place our focus on the coming of Jesus, both His First Advent (2,000 years ago) and His Promised Second Advent, when Jesus comes again. We celebrate that God showed up in remarkable humility as the Babe in Bethlehem, and we anticipate that God will show up again as triumphant King of Eternity.

As we both celebrate and anticipate God showing up, we use the four traditional Advent themes: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. These Advent candles, mark the days... a candle for each theme, and the central, red Christ candle that we will light on Christmas Eve. Today, we light the first candle, and focus on the first Advent theme: Hope.

The problem with this word, hope, is that our common use of the word means something much smaller than what is contained in this theme.

When we say **hope**, we often mean something more like **wish**. It is the sort of thing that goes along with this season. As many of us were out and about these past few days on Black Friday (when retailers go into the black) and on Small Business Saturday, we were among the *wishful*. Many were wishing for deals, others were stumbling on new items that now are on their wish list, and lots of us were wishing that our purchases would delight the soon recipients of our gifts.

Does anyone remember what it was like before the Internet, before Amazon.com and all of the online shopping sites? Do you remember what would come in the mail? Catalogs... big, thick, break-the-back-of-the-postman catalogs. When I was a kid the big three were JC Penney, Montgomery Ward, and Sears. And Sears called their Christmas catalog the **wishbook**.

Page after page of things on to which to place our wishes, our dreams, our hopes. Sometimes those hopes would be fulfilled under the tree on Christmas morning... and sometimes those hopes were unrealistic... a false hope.



When hope is based merely on our wishes, or our assessment of things, or our ability to wish well, or even deliver... our hoping can often disappoint.

I think we most often get “hope” wrong when we think of hope as a **verb**... some action we take.

For Believers, Hope is a noun. We often think of Hope as a verb, something we **do**... but for us, Hope is a noun; it is best understood as something we **have**.



It is not merely an unfounded feeling, that what we want will happen. It is not something we do, or somehow conjure up... hope is something we have. Hope is a noun.

Hope is a noun, something we have; we can think of Hope along these three lines:

1. We have promise.
2. We have provision.
3. We have prospect.



First, we have promise. Does that sound familiar... after our series ***Jesus in the Old Testament?***

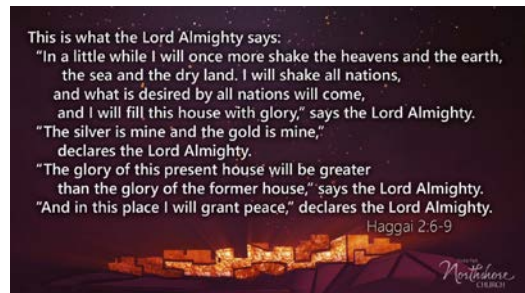
How do you determine if a promise made will be a promise kept? When someone makes an informal promise, how do you know if they will come through? Or how about a more formal promise, the kind of thing we might put into a contract... how do we know if the signature on the bottom line of a contract is worth anything?

One really solid way to evaluate a promise is to look at the record of the past. Does the one making the promise have a good track record? Do they have a history of making good on their promises?

The answer is yes when the One making the promise is God. And the very best example of God delivering on His promise is in the person of Jesus.

We saw, in our recent sermon series, that the Scripture is filled with the promise of the coming Messiah in the Old Testament. We didn't cover them all in our short series; hear what the Prophet Haggai proclaimed around 500 years before the birth of Jesus:

⁶“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. Haggai speaks of “what is desired by all nations.” There is an old Christmas Carol that rightly identifies the desire of all nations: *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*. It says, “Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.”



“Fill this house with glory,” was the cry of God’s people of old... and it is our cry today. Jesus and His glory is the joy of our longing hearts.

Although this wasn't meant specifically for the context of our celebrations of the Christmas season, I think what verse 9 says still applies:

⁸ ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ⁹ ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.” ¹

There are certain folks, some of them even Christians, who are so distracted by the tinsel and all that we've incorporated into this season that they actually get grumpy about it all. I guess I understand the concern about the commercialization of it all... but really folks, don't let the silver and gold and lights and tinsel and all distract.

‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty.

Celebrate it all, it is all God's, and glorify Him in the celebration.

¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Hag 2:6–9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

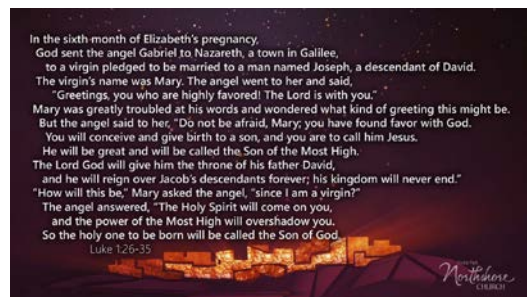
When I think about it, the only theology I had at all before coming to faith when I was twenty was largely compiled through songs I heard. Many of those songs were Christmas carols. I wouldn't say that I heard "Oh Come Emmanuel" in a Macy's and decided to become a Christian... but I think it was all part of the mix.

We have **promise**, and we have **provision**.

Like I said earlier, if **Hope** is based on **us**, we're set up for disappointment since we'll realize that we've had *false hope*. But true Hope is not based on us; it is not something that we do. Hope is something we have. It is God's gift to us.

And, again, the best example of Hope as God's gift to us is in the person of Jesus.

The Promised One of the Old Testament was announced by God's angel, Gabriel, recorded here in Luke.



“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

... “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[b] the Son of God.

Son of the Most High... His Kingdom will never end... the very Son of God!

And then the angel seals the Promise from God with this proclamation of truth:

no word from God will ever fail²

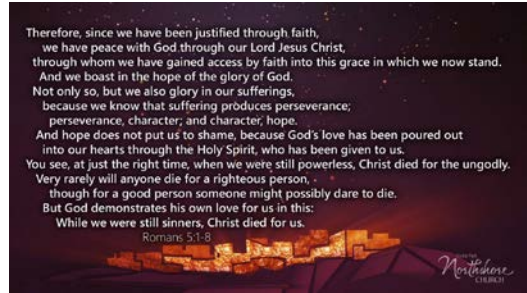
God's promises are good promises. We have this promise. We have this provision. We have this hope. Just what is that hope?



² The New International Version. (2011). (Lk 1:37). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Let's look to another great passage on hope from Romans 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.



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⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.³

This is our hope. This is our provision.

Boasting is generally rude... except when we are boasting in the hope of the glory of God. Not boasting in our *hoping* or *wishing*... but we boast in the hope, the promise and the provision of God.

It isn't a matter of our feelings or circumstances. We don't merely have hope in good times and then lack hope in the difficult times. In fact we value suffering because we know that God does not waste it, but rather God transforms suffering into something wonderful... suffering producing perseverance, perseverance producing character, and character resulting in hope. Shame is replaced with hope from God.

While we were powerless, while we were without hope or righteousness before our holy God, Christ purchased our hope. The Christ of Christmas is the Christ of Good Friday and Easter Sunday too.

³ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 5:1–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

In Jesus we have *promise*, and *provision*, and **prospect**. By “prospect” I mean that we have a future... prospects for a future (I would have just said *future*, but future does not begin with “pro”).

The promise is God’s. The provision has been made by God. And all our prospects for the future are in God’s hands... our futures in this life, and certainly our futures in the eternity that He will rule, with spectacular authority, at His second coming (His Second Advent).

Let’s read these words of Jesus from Luke 21:

²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

For those who are hopeless, those who have not received the Hope of Christ by believing in Jesus... uncertainty, convulsive change, shaking, even the very end of the world, is a terribly frightening thing. It is a reasonable cause of terror.

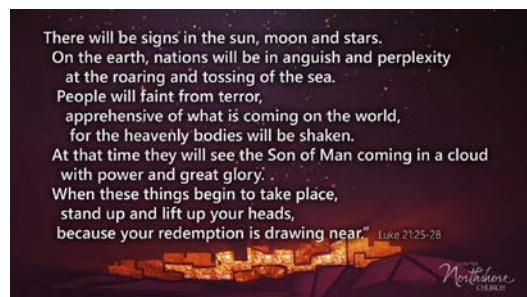
How will those who have no hope respond... especially when Jesus is revealed in His second coming?

But what of those who have Hope?

²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” ⁴

It is a remarkable juxtaposition, isn’t it? Those who have no hope **faint** with terror... but those who have the hope of Christ... “**stand** up and lift up your heads, because your redemption in drawing near.”

This is our prospect. This is our hope!



⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Lk 21:25–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Before our time runs out (that is before our time runs out **this morning**, not all time and the end of the world... I didn't mean to startle you), let's ask the question: So what?



What practical thing can we take away with us today?

If there was such a thing as a *hope-o-meter*, and I could pass it around and each of us could *get a reading* on the *hope-o-meter*... how would we do?

Are we hopeful? Do we have hope?

Let's remember that hope is not something we **do** (a verb)... hope is something we **have** (a noun).



So if you think you score high on the *hope-o-meter*, do a bit of *self inspection*. Is it because you are merely a positive happy person that you find yourself hopeful? If you are a generally happy, positive person... that is GREAT! We all like hopeful people. But take this opportunity this morning to contemplate the **source** of our hopefulness. If it is based merely on our own attitude or our circumstances, that is a hope that will eventually fail, a *false hope* that will not endure through life and on into eternity. Today, let's be sure that under our own hopefulness we have **true Hope**. Let the Hope of Christ overwhelm our own positive outlook and hopefulness. This is a Hope that will endure.

And if you find yourself *scoring low* on the *hope-o-meter*, there is good news for you. Hope, true and lasting and enduring hope is not up to how we **feel**. It is not up to how we **try**. It is not up to our circumstance or our effort or anything that we have done or can do. Hope isn't something we do; it is something we can have.

Receive God's gift of Hope today.

You might be here today and have never really received that gift of Hope from God. It could be that today is your day and the Hope of Christ is ringing true in your heart. It could be that you are hearing God's truth, not only with your **ears** but with your **heart** and **soul**. If that is you today, receive God's gift of Hope today. Believe in Jesus. Believe that the Christ of Christmas is a gift for you... and let that Hope become your Hope today.

For each and every one of us, no matter how we find ourselves on an imaginary *hope-o-meter*... today is a day to receive all of God's gift of Hope. A gift received by faith, a genuine gift of God from His heart to our hearts.

When it comes to *presents under the tree*, it would be rude to ask for more. But when it comes to God's gift of Hope (His promise, His provision, His prospects for our futures)... we worship God by looking to Him for more.

Advent Hope. The word Advent means come or coming. We say come, oh come Emmanuel, our Savior, our God... come and fill our hearts with your gift of Hope today!

