



Today begins the first Sunday of Advent for us. As a church family, we are going to follow in the tradition of many Christians throughout the centuries, and we will focus on the themes of Advent: Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. Each Sunday, we will see how that that Biblical word is taught in the Old Testament, and how it's fulfilled in Jesus' first coming. But we won't stop there. We will also see how Jesus' fulfillment in his first coming should bolster our confidence as we anticipate his second coming.

So today, we're focused on the theme of hope. But, what does that word mean? When you hear that word, you might think about a Christmas wishlist. Kids, do you make wishlists for your parents where you give your parents the list and maybe when you're in bed, you think to yourself, "Oh, I hope my parents get that for me! But if they don't, it's okay, but I really *hope* they do." Then Christmas comes, and maybe some of the things on your list, they got. Others, they didn't. When you hear "hope," you probably think of it this way. The word "hope" simply means to wish for or anticipate something to happen, and it may or may not actually happen. But that's not what the Old or New Testaments means by the Hebrew and Greek words for hope.

The Greek word for hope is "Elpis." If you know your Greek mythology, there was a goddess named Elpis. She was the goddess of hope or expectation. In the mythology, there's a story about the first woman created by the gods. Her name was Pandora. The gods were angered by Prometheus creating humans and then giving humans the gift of fire. So, the gods created Pandora and then gave her a box (or, a jar) with a gift from each god. In reality, those gifts led to mostly misery, despair, plagues and diseases. As Pandora sought to close the jar, only one gift was caught inside: hope. I imagine there are various interpretations of what this means, but I think many would agree that with hope remaining in the jar, it holds out hope to humanity that one virtue remains untainted by the broken world system. That even though everything else seems broken and frail, hope remains intact.

But the question remains, can it be taken out of the jar? Can broken humans experience hope's benefits when this world really has no security in it? This is a powerful question that many people in our day ask. Can I really have hope or should I just create my own meaning?

Now, I would say to "create our own meaning" is just wishful thinking. But if we understand what the Greek word of hope means, and if we understand that the Hebrew word essentially means the same, then there is hope that God has offered to humanity that is more grand and comforting. The meaning of the word hope in the **Bible includes anticipation and also steadfast assurance.** In modern English, probably the closest word we have is "expectation." But even that falls short. In our current day, we might say something like, "I'm so looking forward to, and am completely confident about, this thing happening!" It's not just wishing that this thing would happen. Hope doesn't mean we've created our meaning or made sense of the world for us. Instead, hope refers to a glorious future that is set and we are on our way to it! It's going to happen, and for those who are saved by Christ, we should be excited about it! This is hope.

Now, what does all of this have to do with Jesus coming to the earth 2,000 years ago? Everything. Does sadness and turmoil go away because it's the Christmas season? Are there going to be struggles over the next few weeks for you that you don't even know will happen right now? Probably. Will you also experience many blessings this season? Probably. And will your emotions be high and low? Maybe. Like what I said in last week's sermon, life includes the high, the low, the exciting, the mundane. And one of our questions ought to be, **"What stabilizes us in the tensions (highs and lows) of life?"** The answer is **biblical hope**. And this hope is secured by, and found in, Jesus who was born as a baby over 2,000 years ago! So, the main idea of this sermon is that **Jesus secures our hope in this life, as we anticipate the life to come**.

Let's start with the first part of this statement: **Jesus secures our hope**. What I want to do first is focus on that two-fold idea of hope: anticipation and then assurance. In other words, I want to first see how God, in the Old Testament, instills within us a longing for something to be fulfilled. In other words, what I want us to see is the despair humanity is in and how God promises hope to the despairing. Once we see this anticipation, then we will see how God assures us alongside of that anticipation – leading us all the way to when Jesus comes to secure (or, guarantee) the hope that removes despair from humanity. Make sense? If it doesn't, just keep listening.

When we go all the way back to the beginning with Adam and Eve, we know what happens. Instead of imaging God forth and ruling freely and faithfully under God's rule, they seek to take the authority for themselves and break from God's good rule. Having rebelled against God, God punishes Adam and Eve, and as a result, Adam and Eve begin to experience death. Because they are the representatives of God in this creation, all of creation also suffers under their punishment as well. Death enters. Suffering comes in. But almost immediately after their rebellion, God gives them a promise of hope. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent someday. From that point in Genesis, Moses writes in such a way to get us to notice genealogies. Which mother will birth the serpent-crusher? This world is broken. People sin continually. We have pain and sorrow. Will God restore all things? Where is this seed of the woman?

Then we get to Abraham, and God sets Abraham apart for him and makes a promise. It's a "seed of the woman" kind of promise. God tells him that he will make of Abraham a great nation and through Abraham's seed (and it's in the singular – so we're looking at one in particular) all the nations of the world will be blessed. By the time we get to this point in Genesis, there ought to be excitement! Hope is arising! Is Abraham's son going to be the serpent crusher? But then the story goes on and his wife, Sarah, has no child. Years go by. Decades. When are they going to have a child? There can be no nation without at least one child being born. And then finally, Sarah has a child in her old age. And I want you to hear how the Bible describes Abraham in this time of waiting. In Romans 4:18-21, we read, **"¹⁸In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."**¹

Do you see the repeated word "hope" here? He hoped against hope. It's a play on words here. He believed, meaning that he trusted, the Lord. God's promise was that he would have a seed. So, even though he was about 100 years old, he anticipated God's promise. But we see with this anticipation came assurance. Abraham wasn't just *hoping* he would have a child, like we hope we may get a certain

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 4:18–21.

gift for Christmas. Abraham was anticipating and assured he'd receive it. Why? Because God promised this. God gave Abraham a child. And while that child was not *the* seed, that child is next in line in the genealogy leading to a great nation through which there will be one seed who will crush the serpent and bring an end to death and sin!

This example of Abraham's hope and faith became an example to the entire nation of Israel, and continues to be an example of faith and hope for us today. When God promises something, we can be assured. Even when it seems all hope is lost, we can still have anticipatory and assured hope!

So, as we move into the Old Testament Scriptures and look at the songs of the nation of Israel, we enter the book of psalms, and find words of hope throughout (words of anticipation and assurance). Psalm 39:7 says, "**And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.**"² Hope includes waiting. And the psalmist is waiting on the Lord, anticipating his mercy and grace. Psalm 69:6 proclaims, "**Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord God of hosts. . .**"³ David, the anointed King (who pictures the future seed who will rule over all) prays that all who *hope in the Lord* will not be put to shame through David's rule. David acknowledges he isn't the ultimate hope. The Lord is the ultimate hope. All the people who hope in the Lord are anticipating and assured of a greater day to come! Then Psalm 71:5 says, "**For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.**"⁴ Again, ultimately the Lord is the hope. We long for a day when God unites us complete with him. Look at how hope and trust are connected. There's anticipation, assurance, and dependence on the Lord. Then, let's look a little more at Psalm 130. If you have your Bibles, please turn there:

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! ² O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! ³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. ⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; ⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. ⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. ⁸ And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. ⁵

This psalm is referred to as one of the psalms of ascent. It's called that because this was one of the songs sung by Israelites as they traveled to Jerusalem to head up the mountain to the temple of the Lord. As the songs sung in the ascent are descriptive of what it's like to journey in this life to the Lord's presence. They're songs of hope. They're songs of anticipation, reminding us that as we sojourn and wander in this life, we can settle ourselves in the Lord and his goodness.

In this psalm, the psalmist recognizes his own brokenness and pain. He's pleading for mercy because he knows his own sin. He recognizes that if God were to pinpoint every sin in anyone's life, we would all be punished by God. Can you resonate with this? When you really understand God's perfection, you know you couldn't stand clean in his presence. But the psalmist adds that God is a God who forgives! And when you experience God's forgiveness, you're changed. You begin to "fear" – meaning to honor and

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 39:7.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 69:6.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 71:5.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 130:1–8.

adore and give him the respect he deserves. Because of God's immeasurable kindnesses in forgiving, the psalmist then says he will wait on the Lord and hope in his word. Meaning, in this sojourning in this life, he will wait for all that is to come, and he will hope. He will anticipate and be assured of what's to come. Why? Because God forgives and restores us to him! Then the psalm ends with: ⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. ⁸ And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

This psalm calls every Israelite to follow in Abraham's footsteps. God is a forgiving God. He's bringing forth the seed, the serpent-crusher. He will restore all things and bless all the nations through him. Until then, we sojourn in this world. But as we sojourn, we who turn from our sins and trust in the Lord, experience God's forgiveness and grace. So, continue to wait and continue to hope.

As Israel sings these songs, we move on in Israel's history, and they are called to continue to wait. Then we get to the prophet Isaiah. And in Isaiah 8:16-17, Isaiah prophesies this: ¹⁶ **Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples.** ¹⁷ **I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.** ⁶ Israel seems to have lost hope in the Lord. God has punished Israel. And yet, even though it seems all hope is lost, Isaiah hopes against hope (like Abraham). God must fulfill his promise. And so, in chapter 9 of Isaiah, we come to a prophecy that is often read at Christmastime: ⁶ **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. . . .**⁷

God hasn't forgotten his promise. The nations will be blessed by this child, this seed, who will come and rule over all. He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Can you hear Isaiah's assurance? And, when you read these words, do you see how they are intended to bolster our anticipation? Someday, this child is coming! In the meantime, wait, Israel. Wait on the Lord because he *will* redeem. He will rescue.

And, Israel was called to wait a long time. Hundreds of more years. There were seasons where people wondered if God rejected them. And eventually, there was complete silence from God. No prophet in the land. Hundreds of years went by. But does waiting mean God forgot? Absolutely not! As Paul wrote in Galatians, "when the fulness of time had come, God sent his Son." In other words, at the perfectly planned moment, Jesus came. God never forgot his promise – even though many forgot him.

Yet, even though many forgot, I love how the story of Christmas includes those individuals who didn't forget. For example, Mary clearly hadn't forgotten. When she is told she would carry the Messiah, the seed, she embraces the calling and then praises the Lord by quoting the Scriptures truths and promises of God. She clearly had hoped in the Lord and she's humbled God had chosen her to carry the Christ.

There's two other people I'm encouraged by in the Christmas story: Simeon and Anna. Many tend to think Simeon was a priest because he was in the temple court, but nowhere in the text are we told he's a priest. What we know is that he was an old man and God had promised him that he would remain alive until he saw the Messiah. When Mary, Joseph, and Jesus entered the courts, the Spirit moved in Simeon and Simeon knew who this baby was. Luke writes that Simeon had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. He followed Psalm 130. He was waiting for hope to come. He then takes Jesus in

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 8:16–18.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 9:6–7.

his arms and declares this: ²⁹“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” ⁸ Salvation had come.

Then there’s Anna, a widow for 84 years and worshipped night and day in the temple. When she saw Jesus, we’re told that “she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”⁹ Waiting. The redemption has come. Do you hear Psalm 130? Anna and Simeon had been hoping in the Lord. They had been anticipating. They had been waiting. And they were assured by God. Then, when Jesus entered the courts, they joy welled up inside of them! Hope had arrived in human flesh! The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Serpent-Crusher, Seed of the Woman was in front of their very eyes! He came to the broken down world. He came to a widow and an aged man. He was born to a young woman, who was a poor virgin. Why? To conquer death and sin.

And Jesus did conquer death and sin. He lived the life Adam didn’t live. Jesus became the new representative for a new creation. He himself was perfect, and he perfectly obeyed the Father. Yet, he also endured the punishment our sins deserve. Remember Psalm 130? “If you should mark iniquities”? God marked every iniquity of his children – past and future – and placed them on Jesus on the cross. And Jesus endured the just punishment. He didn’t experience forgiveness. He experienced the justice for our sins. Yet, in that, Jesus accomplished salvation! He took our sins on him, and now anyone who turns to Jesus for forgiveness will not only be forgiven, but they will be given Jesus’ righteousness on them. Think of it. Our sin on Jesus. Jesus’ righteousness on us! If you’ve turned to Christ then, you are reconciled to God. You are a part of a new creation! Do you see how Jesus fulfills the longing of hope in the Scriptures? He himself is our hope, amen? How I pray that if you haven’t trusted Jesus that you would today. And if you have questions on what that means that you would talk to one of us who will be up at the front here this morning.

But there’s more we can learn from the Scriptures call to hope. Just like ancient Israel, we are sojourning. We are still waiting for a future hope. There are promises of God yet to be fulfilled. We want to see Jesus face-to-face and see him physically rule in a sinless and perfect world. This leads to the second half of the main idea: **as we anticipate the life to come.** Please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 10:19-25 says, ¹⁹**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,** ²⁰**by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,** ²¹**and since we have a great priest over the house of God,** ²²**let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.** ²³**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.**¹⁰

I’m going to comment on this briefly. The author essentially states that **In light of Jesus’ first coming and also the reality of him coming again (i.e. – the day drawing near), we ought to respond in three ways.** If I can word it this way, in light of Jesus’ first advent and then his second advent to come. In light of Christmas and a future eternal Christmas:

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 2:29–32.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 2:38.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 10:19–25.

- 1. Draw near in fellowship with God.** As you hear the longing of the Old Testament and see the fulfillment in Christ, along with the joy of people like Anna and Simeon. And as you ponder what Jesus actually has done in saving you, fully embrace your privileges and fellowship with the Lord continuously. Draw near to him. He's always near to you. He never leaves you. If Christmas teaches us anything, it's that the Lord has come to us, he is with us, and he's coming again. So, will you respond by drawing near to him every moment? Every hour? Every day?
- 2. Together with God's people, remain steadfast in our hope-filled confession.** Do you see verse 23? Hold fast the confession of *our hope*. Jesus' death and resurrection is a guarantee that Jesus is victorious and will complete what he became! We have a confession of hope, amen? Our Christmas is so much more full of meaning than that of the world, where all they get are presents that deteriorate. And even in that, we don't get everything we want. And, even if we do get everything we want, we still aren't satisfied. But Christ is the fullness of hope! And this confession isn't something that we individually hold alone. But, we need one another to remind us of our hope. I know I need you. Do you know you need each other in this? As you're discouraged in the sojourning, don't you need fellow Christians reminding you of this? Yes! Because of Jesus' first advent and his future advent, let us hold fast together our hope!
- 3. Let us gather and exhort one another regularly.** This is such an interesting statement, don't you think? In our individualistic culture that wants to think church gathering is optional, the author says that if we really know that Jesus came, and is coming again, then we would gather together in such ways that we encourage each other all the more as we see the future Day getting closer! Jesus died and rose again in order to be the gloriously kind, wondrous Ruler over a new people, a nation. As we gather together, we picture that new family. Together, we encourage each other, hoping for the day when all things will be made new!

So, where do you find yourself in life? Are you encouraged? Excited? Discouraged? Despairing? Somewhere in between? The message of advent is that there is a Savior on whom we can hang all our hope. We actually can have hope in this world as we sojourn because Jesus secures our hope in this life, as we anticipate the life to come.