

“Hope for the Holidays” Isaiah 40:26-31
1st Sunday of Advent 11/28/2004 Pastor Jon Bergemann

O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom us, the captive of Israel, Amen. The Word of God for our consideration this morning is taken from Isaiah chapter 40 (read text). In the name of Jesus, our certain hope, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

What do you hope for in life? Maybe you hope that you will get all your Christmas shopping done by December 25. Maybe you hope that the Redskins will turn things around. Maybe you hope that loved ones far away will be kept safe. Maybe you hope that things will get better at work or school. Maybe you hope that you will get a double action Red-rider Bee-bee gun with a compass in the stock for Christmas.

The list might go on and on regarding what we hope for in life. But do you notice one commonality running through many of the things we hope for? Do you notice that there is a bit of uncertainty, whether small or great, involved with many of the things we hope for?

We hope to get our Christmas shopping done in time – but a quick glance at our December calendars might make us uncertain. We hope the Redskins will turn things around – but a quick glance at their record might make us uncertain. And on and on.

It seems that most of our hope in this world is also laced with a black lining of uncertainty. In fact, the way that we use the word “hope” seems more like “wish”. We wish this or that might happen, but we just can’t be sure.

And so today we light the “hope” candle in our Advent wreath. But should we call it the “wish” candle instead? Does it symbolize everything we wish will happen for us this Christmas, but aren’t sure will come true? What do we mean by “hope”?

Let’s let God answer that question today. He’s gives us a lesson in hope in our text. What’s happening?

He’s speaking to a people who seem to be without hope. It’s around 700 B.C., and God’s Old Testament people are wrestling with issues of homeland security in regards to Middle Eastern nations. The Assyrian and Babylonian empires are looming to their east, threatening to terrorize their lands. Questions raced through their minds, such as “Will we be safe? What’s the future of our nation? Can we have hope?”

But closer to the home front, they are also wrestling with the terrorist attacks of sin. You see, God had warned them that if they did not follow Him with all their hearts, these foreign nations would destroy them. Yet what had God’s people done? They tried to blend into the moral trends of their secular society, and they became tolerant of the worship of foreign gods. They began to ask the question, “What makes me feel good?” instead of “What does God want?” and slipped into sins of sexual immorality. They began to look for comfort in their earthly possessions instead of their eternal life to come. And as a result?

They are faced with crumbling morals, with sinful lives and growing guilt, with dangers to their society and to their souls. They feel lost, scared, helpless, and hopeless. They wonder whether God is still in control, and if He is, whether He could really love them.

How different are we? How different are God’s people in New Testament times? Do we not also see the ugly effects of sin in our society? Do we not also have some sleepless moments as we consider the dangers present to our country? As we consider the growing violence and immorality in our nation? As we see families crumble?

Or maybe as we look in the mirror and see an individual who might feel like crumbling under the weight of work or school? An individual who falls down frequently in his or her fight against sin? An individual who so often would like a daily e-mail from God detailing exactly what will happen each day and exactly what decisions he or she should make, and who often feels lost wondering what to do next? An individual who, instead of standing out from the sin of society, so often slips into the selfish thoughts and actions of the world around us? An individual, who, just like those individuals in the Old Testament, needs desperately to know that God is there, that God stills loves them despite their sin. An individual that needs to know that there is a reason to hope.

So can we have hope? To answer our question, God asks a question. Check out verse 27. God asks, **“Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?’ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”**

To those gasping for hope, God give perspective. He asks us if we remember who He is. Do you remember? He is the everlasting God! Which means what? There will never be a time when He will leave us. He will not grow tired or weary. Which means what? There will never be a time when He will get sick of loving us. He is the Creator of the ends of the earth. Which means what? There is no problem that we can face that His power can't overcome. There is no threat that He can not throttle. He made everything! He has the power to care for us, as well!

But, all of that might lead to one final question: Why? Why would He want to take care of us and love us and strengthen us, when we have so arrogantly sinned against Him? Why would God love us? Why can we have hope?

Remember that last phrase that He told us: His understanding no one can fathom. What does that mean? It means that God does not think like you and me. It means that His motives and actions are not limited like ours.

In essence, what it means is that He looked at the sins of His Old Testament people and, instead of just deciding to wipe them off the face of the earth without hope, He – in a love that goes beyond our understanding – promised that a Savior would come to take away their sin, Immanuel, God with us. A Savior which gave them hope.

And it means that as He looked at the sins of His New Testament people – as He looked at you and me wallowing in the slime of our sin – He promised that the Savior who came, Jesus Christ, indeed lived perfectly in our place. Indeed died for all of our sins on the cross to give us forgiveness. And indeed will come again to take us to be with Him in heaven.

Yes, our Holy God – whose understanding no one can fathom – looked down from heaven upon us who were helpless and hopeless and decided to give us eternal hope. He decided to give us the ultimate Christmas present of all. He decided to give us Jesus.

And there's our hope. Now will you still at times feel tired and weary in this world? Sure. Will you still feel the effects of sin around you? Yes. As our text says, **“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall”** (verse 30). This life won't be perfect. But you can have hope. Why? Because Jesus is coming back again! That is certain!

You see, this hope isn't a wish, it's a fact. When the Bible speaks of hope, it doesn't use the word like we often do. When God speaks about “hoping in something”, He is NOT talking about a wish. He's referring to a positive fact that you can rest on. He is talking about something that is certain. He's talking about a promise of his that will come true.

You can see it in our text. He promises that those who **“hope in the Lord will renew their strength.”** Do you see what that hope is in? What it is based on? The Lord! The hope God gives us is a certain knowledge that He loves us and that better things are to come. That we have a Savior who will make that happen.

That's real hope! That's real certainty in an uncertain world. I don't know if the Redskins will turn things around. But I do know this: Jesus is coming back. It's certain. I can have hope.

I don't if the problems in your life right now are going to get better or worse. But I do know this: Jesus is coming back. It's certain. And those problems will end. You can have hope.

I don't know whether things in the Middle East will get better or worse. But I do know this: God created all. He's in control. He's coming back again to make a new heavens and a new earth. We can have hope.

I don't know how many more minutes I have left on this earth or how many minutes you have. But I do know this: God will not take me or you home to heaven a second too soon or a second too late. And we will live forever with Him in heaven. As our text says, we will soar

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on wings like eagles; we will run and not grow weary, we will walk and not be faint. We can have hope.

I don't know if you will get everything on your list for Christmas this year, but I do know this: You have received the only gift you truly need – Jesus lived, died, and rose for you – and he's coming back again. It's certain! It's what our hope rests in and rests on! Oh come, oh come Immanuel! Amen.