

**Hope: Confident Expectation of What God Has Promised**

Romans 8:18-28 & Psalm 42:5-6a

As we start the new season of Advent this year, we will have time to think about the meanings of the traditional messages of Advent, *Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love*. Each of the messages points us to Jesus Christ. For years, people in our nation have celebrated this season using the phrase “*Happy Holidays*,” a trend that appears to diminish the central message of the season—Jesus Christ—in our culture and society. Endless commercialism has also played an important role in quietly spreading the message, “*The more you purchase, the happier you can be*.” But they seem to be silent about the reason for this season, which is Jesus Christ.

A few years ago, there was a report from the Culture and Media Institute about the message of the season. The institute monitored the major TV networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC for two years. They found that of all the stories that spoke about Christmas, *only* 1.3 percent of those stories had any mention of God. Those networks and their shows talked about the weather, the economy, travel, and the trendy gifts everyone wanted. They discussed various topics but avoided the religious significance of the holy day. It’s like making a Thanksgiving dinner without the turkey or dakgalbi.

**Why HOPE?**

Why do we need to hold on to the message of HOPE during this season? The Bible describes our human situation as suffering and longing for hope for freedom. “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us... We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*” (Romans 8:18 & 22-23 NRSV).

Suffering and hardship entered the world as a result of sin as we can see in Genesis 3. “*To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children... To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”* (Genesis 3:16-17 and 19 NIV).

We need hope to be freed from our suffering and pain. We need hope to be liberated from the effects of sins. We need a hope that empowers us to overcome the challenges and difficulties of life.

### **Jesus Christ as Our Hope**

That is why Jesus Christ came to us. Without acknowledging the message of sin and its effects, there can be no message of hope; and at the center of the message of hope is Jesus Christ.

**“Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; ... As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.”** (Zechariah 9:9, 11-12 NRSV)

This prophecy is fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ as he took our sins upon himself, was crucified on the cross, and resurrected from death, overcoming all of our suffering and pain caused by our sins.

**“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”** (1 Peter 1:3 NRSV)

That is why Christian hope can be defined as **“Our Confident Expectation of What God Has Promised.”** All the promises of God have been, or will be, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

### **So what shall we do?**

#### **Wait Patiently.**

We have to remember that waiting is a part of our hope in Jesus Christ. Let us read the Scripture on the screen together.

**“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”** (Romans 8:24-25 NRSV)

Wait and hope are the twin anthems of Advent. The root of the Latin word for “hope” is **“spes,”** which can also be translated as “wait.” Furthermore, the Hebrew root word for “hope” is **קָוָה** (qavah), and it also contains the meaning of “wait,” which implies a sense of eager anticipation or trust. Our hope includes our wait with trust and expectation for Jesus Christ.

**Trust what God is doing in and for your life.**

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit[d] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27 NRSV).

The Holy Spirit is also called, *παράκλητος* (Paraklētōs), which means “**Advocate, Helper, Comforter, or Counselor.**” God is walking closely with us, helping us, comforting us, and counseling us so that we can overcome the darkness that envelopes us by shedding the light of Christ in us and through us to the world.

"Darkness comes. In the middle of it, the future looks blank. The temptation to quit is huge. Don't. You are in good company ... You will argue with yourself that there is no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you and I can ever conceive. Wait. Pray without ceasing. Hope." (John Piper)

Please hear the word of encouragement from this Psalm.

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you...” (Psalm 42:5-6a NRSV).

**Finally, let us remember that we are called to be God’s message of hope for the world.**

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16 NIV).

Our identity as the light of the world is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of the community in and through Jesus Christ, as described in Isaiah 49:6.

“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6b NIV).

Those who have hope in Christ do not merely accept reality as it is. They share in Christ's suffering, risk their lives for those without hope, keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, and embrace the world's discomfort as they become bearers of hope for others.

I received a Christmas letter a few years ago from a church member who lost her husband in 2017. It was an unexpected death and she and her family and their friends were all shocked. It was not easy for her to say goodbye to her husband because he was such a caring and nice husband and father. When I read the letter from her, I was grateful to God for His healing touch has been with her since her husband's passing.

### **A Church member's Christmas Letter**

"This has been an exciting year for me.....

One tree can start a forest

One smile can start a friendship

One candle can wipe out darkness

One child laid in a manger showed us how to love and forgive

Merry Christmas"

After I came to know that she was one of the people in the church who had helped those in need behind the scenes, I was deeply moved. Rather than giving in to her own loss and sorrow, she seemed to cling to the ultimate hope in Jesus Christ. By focusing on Him, she became a vessel of hope for others.