

Advent Hope

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Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 0 0] And so here we are in Advent, the first Sunday of Advent. And traditionally, as you can see, we light candles. And each of the candles, according to tradition, and we're not a church that follows church tradition too closely, though we tend to follow Advent, the four candles each represent something.

They represent hope, joy, peace, and love. So this Sunday, my theme is hope. And the passage I want to read from Jeremiah chapter 33 is from a part of Jeremiah's book, which is called sometimes the Book of Consolation.

Because Jeremiah, if you know anything about him, he was known as a bit of a misery guts, really. He was called a weeping prophet. But he had a good reason to be a misery guts.

I mean, he lived at a time when Israel was going through a great political crisis, was under siege from the Babylonians. The northern kingdom had already by this time been in captivity and then had been repopulated with Jews and Gentiles.

So it was a mixed race area now. And the Jews in Judah in the south were a little bit contemptuous of their northern brothers or half-brothers, as they began to think of them.

[1 : 2 6] All of these people who had been sent into the land to repopulate the land in order to destabilize the Jewish nation. And all that was left was Judah in the south.

Judah's capital, Jerusalem, was the place of the temple. So it was a place of real importance and real spiritual significance to the Jewish people.

And there were people who thought that this was never going to be destroyed, that Jerusalem was somehow impregnable because God's temple was there. As long as the temple of the Lord was there, then in their own mind the Lord was there.

And so the Jewish people used to say, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. In other words, we're never going to be overtaken because the temple is here. It's a bit like America having Captain America, if you know the films.

As long as God is on our side, nothing bad is going to happen. But of course, that kind of trust became a complacent kind of trust where the people began to behave very badly.

[2 : 4 2] There was injustice, there was oppression, or all kinds of evil taking place in the city, including idolatry. And still they thought God would turn a blind eye to it because he was on their side.

How often people still do that today. They think that because God is on their side, it excuses all their bad behavior. No, it doesn't. For what does the Lord require of you, the prophet asks, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

There is a direct connection between your moral lifestyle and your relationship with Jesus. If you are not living the Christian life, then you cannot expect Christian blessing.

Yeah. And there are nations today that call themselves Christian nations that are Christian in name only. It was the same for Jerusalem.

And so along comes Jeremiah, and he's got a message, and this message is, Jerusalem is going to be destroyed, and the temple is going to be a ruin. And nobody wanted to hear that.

[3 : 47] He has a killjoy if ever there was one. Imagine if there was Twitter in Jeremiah's day. You imagine the bad press he would get for that. And so Jeremiah was locked up in prison for his ills, for his discouragement of the nation.

The king, Zedekiah, just wanted to shut him up, send him away. And prison wasn't very comfortable. He was even put down a well one time to try and shut him up.

Imagine that. But he was lifted out and rescued. And in spite of Jeremiah's love for his people, he was a weeping prophet because he loved the nation, and he wanted the nation to be on the side of God.

But in spite of that, he told them the truth. And that's the thing about truth, you see. Truth is truth, whether we like to hear it or not. Truth sometimes upsets us.

But it doesn't upset us just because it's bad news. It upsets us in order to put right what we can in order that the bad news can become good news.

[4 : 59] Or at least the bad news can become some form of spur to stir us up, to live a life that is perhaps more conducive for well-being and good health.

If you get bad news from the doctor, it's not because the doctor hates you, is it? It's because the doctor wants you to kind of put your lifestyle right and get yourself sorted. There's no point just lamenting the bad news.

So Jeremiah, though he was a weeping prophet, was also a prophet of hope. So let's just read a section of Jeremiah 32, verses 14 to 16. It'll come on the screen, a very short section.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

[5 : 58] In those days, Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety, and this is the name by which it will be called. The Lord is our righteousness.

Now think of the backdrop I've just given you. Jerusalem was not a place of justice and righteousness. It was not a place of hope. And so in the midst of this darkness, in this book of consolation, four chapters, Jeremiah chapter 30 to 34, in these four chapters, Jeremiah points to the distant future when the righteous branch will come who will bring hope for the nation.

It's said in these enigmatic terms in order to stir up the spiritual minds of those who still had ears to hear. Sometimes God speaks to us in enigmas.

And when you think of the birth of Jesus, as you think of the coming of the Messiah, there's nothing really more enigmatic than that, is there? A baby being born in a manger, in a stable, in obscurity.

He is going to be the savior of the world. That isn't the way the BBC would kind of set it all up, what Sky or any of these other groups would be. It was easily missed.

[7 : 20] God wants us to work hard at discovering truth. And here is truth in its nascent form that in the future, one is going to come who will restore Israel's fortunes in righteousness.

Now we all need hope. Next slide, please. Don't we? We all need hope. I want you to ask yourself a question. What do you hope for? What do you hope will happen for you in the future that will maintain or guarantee your happiness in this life?

It's a question worth asking, isn't it? When we're younger, we kind of just hope that we'll continue to grow old and be healthy and get a good job and find somebody we love and settle down and have children perhaps, have a nice home and everything will be fine and we'll live until we're a good old age.

And because it feels so distant in the future, that's a hope that we can cling on to for a lot of years without really analyzing that hope. You know, when I was an eight-year-old or a ten-year-old, I didn't really think much about the future beyond, you know, the next week or the next year and time seemed to go so slowly when you're a kid, especially summer holidays.

Yeah, great to start with and boy, it was boring. When you get a bit older, like my age, which I'm nearly 60 now, which is unbelievable.

[8 : 55] I don't know where that time has gone. Time goes so much faster, doesn't it? Like my life is lived from Friday to Friday at the moment because my mother's in hospital having just had a stroke.

She's very poorly. And so every Friday I have to go to Sunderland and I hate driving. The older I get, the more I dislike driving. I used to drive without thinking.

Now I hate driving because everybody drives too fast and everybody's crazy. Everybody's such a bad driver. Either that or it's me.

I really don't know. But it's quite scary. The more vulnerable you become, the more your eyesight wanes and your kind of reactions slow down, the more tricky it becomes.

And then I look at my dear mom, 87, pretty much bed bound. And I remember back to when she was young and healthy and vibrant and everything was well.

[10 : 03] And I looked at her on Friday and held her hand as she kind of once again cried out in distress and said how much she hated it in the hospital. And I said to her, well, what do you say?

Oh, we're going to take you to South Shields. Perhaps we'll get you into a nice home. Not much consolation, that. Instead, I held her hand and I said, the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. Here though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. There is no greater hope than that when you're 87 and dying.

[11 : 05] And that is my hope. That is the hope I have. The older I get, the more I realize that the stuff I have is quickly and rapidly going to become somebody else's.

I hope you appreciate it, Eve. There won't be much. All of the things that I've ever achieved, all of the things that were ever precious to me, one day, will no longer be relevant.

And the only thing that will be relevant is that I am with the presence, I am with Jesus in the presence of the Lord forever. That's what will be relevant. That's hope, you see.

That's what I hope in. That's the answer to the question I posed. What you hope that will happen in the future that will remain or guarantee your happiness in this life?

My answer is, I will one day be absent from the body and present with the Lord. And that is the only guarantee I have. One day, the righteous branch will make me righteous, is making me righteous, and I will be with him forever.

[12 : 22] That's hope, you see, in the midst of gloom. Blessed is he who expects nothing, Alexander Pope said, for he shall never be disappointed. Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.

We all need hope. We can't live without hope. Life is hard enough to be without hope. People who despair, people who are depressed, people who have nothing to live for, they desperately need hope.

I read yesterday about a vagrant, a man who lived on the street, a homeless person, a rough sleeper, they call it. It strikes me that all the time they're trying to find nicer words to describe a horrible existence.

A rough sleeper who put his little dog to sleep next to him and just wrapped him up in the only blanket he had and then froze to death next to his dog. His dog was fine. He died.

Not a lot of hope there. Do pray for people who live on the streets to try and help them because life is not good for them.

[13 : 32] Very little hope. And then I read about the Queen yesterday in the paper. You know, the Queen spent her last weekend on earth with her minister from the Church of Scotland. All weekend.

Because she knew she was dying. And the thing that brought her hope was her faith in Jesus. We all need hope no matter how rich we are.

We all need hope. Remember the Queen had her Annus Horribilus her horrible year. Even the Queen can have horrible years.

And remember Alfred Lord Tennyson said smiles from the threshold of the year to come whispering it will be happier. Well, will it? Will it? We all hope that on New Year's Eve don't we?

Oh, next year's going to be my best year ever. Well, I really hope it is. But there's no guarantee. You see, in order for hopes to be valuable they have to be what we call certain hopes.

[14 : 36] Next slide, please. You know who this is, don't you? This is Billy Joel, Uptown Girl. Yeah? I can't remember anything else he sang. But apparently he's a great star, Billy Joel.

Billy Joel got married to a lady called Elizabeth Weber who was a bit of a business lady and she took over the management of his career. And then she passed that management on to her brother Frank Weber.

And Frank Weber was a really good manager. He nicked 90 million dollars off Billy Joel. And so Billy Joel sued him. Frank Weber then decided to declare bankruptcy.

And after years and years of fighting, Billy Joel got three million dollars back. Wow. It's not much of a consolation, is it? There would have been times over those years that he was hoping he'd get all his money back and some profit.

But his hopes were cruelly disappointed. The Bible says be careful about the uncertainty of riches. Don't trust in the uncertainty of riches.

[15 : 43] If you're very wealthy, I'm really happy for you. Well done. It's really easier to be wealthy than poor. So you will probably have a happier life. But just be mindful that the Bible says don't put your hope in uncertain riches.

but in God who does not disappoint you. We have what we call next slide a certain hope. Romans 5 Paul alluded to it.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice.

Listen, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

And you know the wonderful thing about Christian hope is this, that even when you suffer, even when it's difficult, even when it's hard, you still have hope. because you're seeing that this is somehow forming and shaping you and changing you to become a better person.

[17 : 03] It's a bit like doing exercise. None of us particularly like it, not when it's tough, but it makes us better people, makes us stronger people, makes us healthier people unless you become obsessed with exercise and then you become a bore of course, but never mind.

Never mind. Difficulties shape us. Real difficulties shape us.

See, I look at my mom in hospital and now all I think about is how precious she is to me. at least I have the time to discover that.

Yeah? Nobody wants to see anybody suffer. But life has a way of stripping away all that is unimportant and just to focus on, help you to focus on what really is important.

And there's nothing more important than loving relationships. Not really. That's what really matters in the end. The people you love. The people who mean something to you, not because of what they have given you, but because of who they are to you.

[18 : 17] So even suffering, even suffering, even difficulties, they form our character, they make us more like Jesus, they give us a hope that does not disappoint and the love of God is poured into our hearts so that when things are tough, we hold on to Him because we know we've got nobody else to turn to.

When things are dark and when things are difficult, Jesus will not disappoint us. See, the Bible has an interesting symbol for hope.

Do you know what that symbol is? It came up in the song. The symbol is the anchor. Hebrews 6, 17-20 says, When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. A hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf having become a high priest forever.

An anchor of the soul. Our hope. It steals us in adversity. It gives us a reason to believe that when we buried our loved ones there is still hope.

[19 : 47] This faith that we have in Jesus, this faith that is centered upon Him, this faith that believes in the Son of God who died and rose again to forgive us our sins and to guarantee us eternal life is an anchor for the soul.

It keeps us grounded and keeps us steadfast. You know what an anchor does? It's not very big in the scheme of things but it can hold a tanker in place when it grips the ground beneath the surface of the deep or at the surface of the deep.

our faith is an anchor of hope in the midst of uncertainty. And so next slide please Josh.

We're reminded in these words from Jeremiah that we have a word of hope and a word of hope is given here in our text in the midst of all of this uncertainty the destruction of Israel the desolation of the land the people being taken away in captivity the royal family eventually being taken captive government breaking down the temple being destroyed the Levitical system breaking down nothing else you can imagine could be worse to the Jews than to lose their temple and to lose their leaders of worship and in the midst of this Jeremiah says the days are surely coming says the Lord when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah so in the midst of all this darkness and all this uncertainty there is hope in the midst of darkness there is hope you remember what Isaiah says in Isaiah chapter 9 about Jesus he says there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish in the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea the land beyond the Jordan

Galilee of the nations the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light those who dwell in the land of deep darkness on them light has shone and unto us a son is born the wonderful counselor the mighty God the everlasting father the prince of peace Jesus is coming in to bring light into the darkness of our lives it's why we gladly celebrate Advent he brings light into the darkness of our lives haven't you discovered that it is the most precious thing in life to know Jesus it is a hope an anchor for the soul do you remember old Simeon Simeon had begun to get wind of the fact that this special baby had been born don't know quite how he got this but he'd spent all his adult life waiting and he waited in a specific place in the temple in Jerusalem waiting for the consolation of Israel we're told he was a righteous and devout man and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ and he came in the spirit into the temple and when the parents brought in the child

[23 : 20] Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said Lord now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word for my eyes have seen your salvation that you've prepared in the presence of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel he took a baby in his arms and he said I can die now I'll die happy now because this is what I've lived for all my life when the queen died she left behind all of the pomp and ceremony and all of the riches and everything else she took the hand of Jesus and went to heaven that was her consolation and that is the consolation for every Christian who hopes in Jesus who can look at Jesus as Simeon did and say now I can die in peace for I know my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared for me

Advent is acknowledging that there is darkness in the world but Advent is telling us that light has come and there is hope and thank God every Christmas we get a reminder of that every Christmas as life changes and turns over and we get one year older and one year nearer to death we're reminded that we have salvation in Jesus Christ a word of hope next slide please Josh we also have secondly not just a word of hope but a specific hope and that specific hope is described for us here in those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land a righteous branch okay think of a tree and think of a tree of life and think of every branch as a line that leads to your original root yeah if you do your family tree you know what I'm referring to and it's interesting isn't it that in the gospels two of the gospel writers are concerned about Jesus family tree they tell you his genealogy and when you're reading the gospels and you read

Matthew or you read Luke you think I'll just skip this bit now because it's full of names many of which are unpronounceable and it's not really that important let's get to the really juicy stuff except the very first verse in Matthew tells us of the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham now why is that important it's important because for Jews Abraham is the emblematic figure of faith the father of the nations and it's important because David is the emblematic figure of monarchy the king of the nations and God made a promise to David that they would never fail to be a descendant of his on the throne of David but then Jerusalem was destroyed the kingship was also destroyed and for hundreds of years there was no king had God's promises failed no God said

I am going to raise up a righteous branch for David who will reign on David's throne forever and that righteous branch is Jesus the son of Abraham the son of David and so the promise made to Jeremiah here has kind of two levels to it there's a surface level promise that talks about the restoration of the land the restoration of the nation the restoration of the temple the restoration of the Levitical priesthood so that's there but none of it is ultimately fulfilled in these things the righteous branch that will restore the nation forever is not found in a particular king earthly king it is found only in Jesus and so you have promises attached in this book of consolation that speak of more than just earthly work for example if you turn to

Jeremiah 31 33 and 34 we get reference here to a covenant this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time declares the Lord I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts I will be their God and they will be my people no longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying know the Lord because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more so the promise that is being made in this book of consolation is not just a promise for time not just a promise that yes I'll rebuild the temple but one day it will be destroyed again and then it will be rebuilt again and then you'll have a king and you'll have another king and you'll have another king who'll die after that one no no the righteous branch that will result not just in earthly restoration but in eternal salvation where people's sins will be forgiven forever and ever and in in Bible prophecy we talk about the already and not yet the tension between promises that are made that have been fulfilled and promises that have not yet been completely fulfilled in Jesus let me give you two examples to make this concrete think of when Jesus came and preached the kingdom of heaven he said repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand this was his promise the kingdom of God is here it's available but it has not yet fully been realized

[29 : 52] Jesus has gained victory on Calvary over sin and death on the cross he gains victory over death at the resurrection and yet people still die so what has gone wrong the answer is nothing the point is that physical death is part of the transformative process that will lead to our ultimate perfection in glorified bodies we have to physically die in order for our bodies to be glorified and changed you have thought of that the only exception to that rule is going to be those who are still alive when Jesus returns but even then their bodies will be changed so death becomes part of the process or the redemption of salvation but we already have the promise not yet fulfilled or take another example in John 14 Jesus says my peace I give to you not as the world gives give I you do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid there you go he says you've got peace he says look

I'm going to prepare a place for you and when I go I will come back to receive you to myself that where I am you will also be and the disciples are not convinced they say well Lord show us the father and we'll be happy you know why can't we now go with you Jesus says to them well don't worry about it I'm going to give you the spirit and the spirit is going to live in you he's going to remind you of everything I've told you and in this world you're going to have trouble be of good cheer I have overcome the world so on the one hand he's giving them promises on the other hand he's saying they're not all going to be fulfilled now that's why we have something called faith because faith is required to allow us to hope in things not yet seen that's what faith is that's how it's defined faith is the substance of things hoped Jeremiah says a righteous branch is coming he's going to end all of this destruction and all of this heartache and all of this pain you're going to have your ultimate your dreams ultimately fulfilled in him but not yet not just yet and we need to remember that about

Bible prophecy there are things that are true now and there are things that will be true for us in the future we have a specific hope in the words of Jesus and it is in that hope that we must trust and there is a test an acid test for you today do you trust in the words of Jesus as you live your life each day as you get up in the morning oh it's a terrible day it's going to be a dreadful day I just know it I'm just never going to be able to manage oh hang on doesn't Jesus say you can do all things through me who gives you strength oh I'm so anxious I'm so worried I don't know how I'm going to cope I just can't cope anymore with life Jesus says hang on my peace

I give to you do not let your heart be troubled do not be afraid doesn't mean notice that you won't be troubled it just means here is the antidote to trouble if you'll take it our hope is specific it is rooted in the words of Jesus and when we come to face death Jesus says do not let your heart be troubled!

I go and prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again to receive you to myself that where I am you will also be is that your hope is it a specific hope in the specific word of Jesus that says it's all going to be okay in the end and then the last point from this passage!

[34 : 19] this hope is transformative the prophet says to Jeremiah I'm going to raise up a righteous branch so play on words here that you can't see in English Zedekiah means the Lord is righteous but God is raising up a righteous branch who will transform the nation so that the nation can call itself the Lord our righteousness play on words Zedekiah in other words knew that the Lord is righteous just like people do oh yes the Lord he's well he's powerful isn't he's almighty yes he's strong yes he's good he's holy yeah I know that but it doesn't transform but when Jesus the hope of the nation comes he transforms people's lives so that they identify with him to be able to say he is my righteousness and that of course is what the gospel gives us we are justified by faith so that

Jesus becomes our righteousness so that no matter how bad we have been no matter how much we have sinned no matter how wicked our past has been Jesus can cleanse us from all of that and become our righteousness so that we become acceptable before God and on the day of judgment when we stand before him we will not be dressed in a righteousness of our own but be dressed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ his sinless life imputed to me that I might become sinless before God and acceptable to a holy God the Lord our righteousness and it's important for us to remember isn't it that there are lots of people who know lots of stuff about God but it is one thing to know something about God the Lord is righteous and a very different thing to know

God as your righteousness just as there are many people that will celebrate Christmas and even Advent in churches who know nothing of the hope that God offers us in the Advent season the Lord my righteousness so Advent is a time of hope last slide please one of the hymns we sing Christmas carols come now long expect the Jesus born to set thy people free from our fears and sins release us let us find our rest in thee Israel strength and consolation hope of all the earth thou art dear desire of every nation joy of every longing heart the Lord our righteousness the joy of every longing heart!

come! come thou long expected Jesus let us pray to to to to to!

to to