

“Fixing Your Hope”

Isaiah 2:1-5

Series: Advent 2008 [#1]

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Theme: **True Hope Is Indispensable.**

Introduction

Advent. Advent is the time of preparation for celebrating Christmas as we should, in a way that truly honors Christ. It also should be a time of preparation for living each day as we should. This year we are focusing on four basic themes of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Today we begin with Hope.

Hope, as with the other three themes, is familiar to us, but often is fuzzy. What do we really mean by *hope*? People say,

- “I hope I get a raise.”
- “I hope it doesn’t snow at all this winter.”
- “I hope I get a Nintendo Wii for Christmas.”
- “I hope my child doesn’t die from her cancer.”
- “I hope the economy doesn’t slide into another world-wide Great Depression.”
- “I hope the car will make it through one more winter.”
- “I hope I will be with Jesus in heaven forever.”

Our dictionaries give us a range of meaning for hope. For example, to desire something with a degree of expectation that it will be fulfilled. And, to trust or rely on.

R.W. Church, who was Dean of St. Paul’s in London, described one way people looked at hope back in 1885:

“...hope is thought of, at first sight as a self-regarding quality; something which throws forward its desires into the future, and dwells on what it imagines for itself. And hope, of all things, is delusive and treacherous; it tempts to security and self-deceit; it tempts us to dreams which cannot be realised, which divert us from the necessary and wholesome realities which *do* concern us: it is the mother of half the mistakes, half the fruitless wanderings, half the unhappiness of the world.”

From there, of course, he goes on to what true Christian hope is: how it is concerned with things here and now as well as the future; that it is not a self-deluding optimism; that it is based on the clear, certain promises of God; and, that it is our duty as Christians to hope and a sin against God’s goodness not to hope.

We don't have the time this morning to flesh out the meaning of Biblical hope from the Old and New Testaments. My short description is that true Christian hope is *a certain and confident expectation for something in the future based on God and His truth*. As one man writes, "When the Word says, 'Hope in God!' it does not mean 'Cross your fingers.' It means, to use the words of William Carey, 'Expect great things from God.'"

Today we are thinking about "*Fixing Your Hope*." As you may have already figured out, I will use that phrase with more than one dimension or meaning today. The central truth I want us to see from the opening 5 verses in Isaiah chapter 2 is that *True Hope Is Indispensable*.

Getting A Fix On Isaiah's Message Of Hope.

We begin with getting a fix on Isaiah's message of hope. Isaiah's ministry was to Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, had fallen away from God and fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., during Isaiah's ministry in the south. Judah was following the same steps as the northern ten tribes in turning away from God. The first chapter is God's assessment and condemnation of that unfaithfulness. He said that...

- Judah had revolted against Him (2);
- they were sinful and corrupt from head to foot (4, 6, 21-23);
- He rejected their sacrifices, offerings, festivals and prayers because they did not flow from true faith (10-15);
- He called them to repent, be cleansed and obey (16-19);
- but, if they refused and continued to rebel, He would turn His hand against them (25) and destroy them (20, 28).

These were strong words to sinful people. There is a brief indication of future restoration (26-27), but the overall theme of the first chapter is condemnation.

The opening verses of chapter 2 change focus as God gives a message of hope. It was a message about the future, not their day. In fact, it is a message still in the future as God spoke of the time when the Messiah, Christ, will reign on earth. Let's turn now to this message of hope.

To begin with, it is a hope that is certain. Look at verse 2,

"Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it."

Note, first, that God said "it *will* come about...[it] *will* be established... [it] *will* be raised... and all the nations *will* stream to it." This is not just wishful thinking! Nor is it just a possibility or even a probability. It is a certainty—"it *will* come about." It is a statement of fact from God who is, as Jesus said, "the truth" (John 14:6), from God who "cannot lie"

(Titus 1:2). At the very start of this message of hope we see that it is *a certain and confident expectation for something in the future based on God and His truth*.

Secondly, note the phrase “in the last days.” Regardless of how they see the Bible’s unfolding of future events, most students of Scripture recognize this as an *eschatological* phrase, that is, a phrase which refers to God’s bringing an end to human history and the world as we now know it.

The New Testament makes it clear that Christ’s first coming, which we are celebrating in this season, marked the beginning of “the last days.” These *last days* will be concluded when Christ wraps up human history, pulls the plug on time as we know it, and ushers all of His creation into the eternal state. Based on the text here and other passages, I see this as a reference to the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. The main point for us today, however, is that these things will take place. They are certain. And so, the hope of the Bible, the hope of all believers is a *certain hope*.

Secondly, God tells us through Isaiah that it is a hope that will be sought by all in that day. Go on to verse 3,

“And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

Verse 2 has already told us that in that day God’s government (or *mountain*) will be established above or over all the nations of the world. There are a number of astounding things here in verse 3.

- They, the peoples, the nations *themselves* will decide to go to Jerusalem to learn about God.
- Secondly, they will encourage others to go with them.
- Thirdly, they will go to be taught by God, by Christ who will be reigning over His kingdom.

There is more, and we will come to that in a moment.

Here are the nations and peoples of the world with all their self-made religions and creeds streaming to Jerusalem to seek the truth, true hope for themselves. So much for the postmodern myth that there is no certain truth, and each person’s or little community’s perception of what is true for them at the moment is all there is.

What a day that will be! Spectacular? *Yes!* Surprising? No. For God the Son, Christ Himself will be there ruling and displaying His perfect character. This hope Isaiah saw and proclaimed will be sought by all in that day.

Next, it is a hope that will transform many. Still here in verse 3 we are told the people

will be going and encouraging others to go with them “that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.”

They will be going not just out of curiosity, nor only to learn about God, but also to learn to “walk in His paths,” to follow, obey Him. In Psalm 24 King David prays to God,

“Make me know Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your *paths*. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day.” (4-5)

In Psalm 17, as he pleads for God’s help, God’s action against his enemies, he says, “My steps have held fast to Your *paths*. My feet have not slipped.” (5)

What a contrast to the days of Isaiah, not only to the nations of the world, but also to Judah. Turn to the next chapter, where in verse 12 God says, “... O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your *paths*. The LORD arises to contend, and stands to judge the people” (12b-13). What a contrast also to our own day!

This is a certain hope of many from all parts of the globe who will be transformed by what? By a ...

- different, novel political or social theory. No.
- By a different, innovative governmental structure. No.
- By a different, new, old, traditional, contemporary form of worship. No again.

No, none of these, nor countless other ideas, but, by the true knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ.

Then, finally, Isaiah’s message of hope is one of a hope that will bring peace. Verse 4,

“And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.”

What do you think of Isaiah’s statement? Is it really a certain hope, or a beautiful fantasy? When we look at the world today, and the entire recorded history of the human family, it can seem to be an impossible dream or fantasy. Some people have given up on hope for nations and peoples getting along. The main character of a novel hears about a book titled *What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?* That’s quite a title. He got a copy, but found it was a short read. The whole book consisted of a one-word answer. The word? “Nothing.”

Others, including some in and around the church, quickly spin to an application of this verse without, apparently, first accepting and declaring the meaning. There is a great deal of analysis about the violence and evils of war, and how bringing about peace starts within each one of us. But so often that is as far as it goes. Application, of both good and terrible

varieties, without the core truth.

The hope of this verse is the promised, certain work of Christ as He rules. First, note that this is not a description of what the church or nations will bring about. It is Christ Who will rule and judge over the nations. Secondly, this is not a picture of eternity, for there still are nations and they still will have disagreements and conflicts with one another. Thirdly, Christ's rule will be the *supreme court*, the final word, the binding decision. And, then, there is no place, Christ will give no place for war to settle conflicts.

With war taken off the table by Christ and His righteous rule, there will no longer be any planning or scheming of strategy and tactics; no more devising of Trojan horses or stealth bombers. When Christ in His kingdom takes war off the table, the nations will no longer use their resources for weapons of small scale or mass destruction, but for providing for the needs of their people.

Isaiah was privileged to see and share what the Messiah will do when He reigns. It will not always be as it is now. There is hope! There is certain hope for peace!

This, in brief summary, is Isaiah's message of hope here. It does not take any kind of stretch to see how, after the message of condemnation in chapter 1, this would be vital, indispensable to him and his people.

Now we need to turn to ourselves and our hope. *True Hope Is Indispensable* to us.

Getting A Fix On Our Hope.

Our hope may need to be *fixed* in the sense that it is faulty and not functioning as it ought to. It may not be grounded as it must be to be true, Biblical hope. True Christian hope is hope truly fixed on God, His truth and kingdom. One thing that is crystal clear in verses 2-4 is that this future certainty is completely God's work.

- His government will be over all.
- His truth will go out to all.
- He will judge between all the nations.
- All the peoples will stream to Him.

Our hope, to be true Christian hope, must be a certain expectation for the future, for our future based on God and His truth. Listen to a few Scriptures which underscore this.

- 1 Peter 1:3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to *a living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

- 2 Thessalonians 2:16 states the same theme as it tells us God "... has loved us and given us eternal comfort and *good hope* by grace ..."

As we noted last week, in the midst of unbelievable atrocities, Jeremiah was able to say, "The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I have *hope* in Him."

Question: Is your hope, what you long for and expect, truly fixed on God today, each day? After Peter opened his first letter by praising God for His great grace and salvation, as we just read, he wrote, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, *fix your hope completely* on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13).

Is your hope fixed completely on God? Completely fixed on His great grace in sending Christ into this world for you? On His great grace which will be revealed when He sends Him to this world again for you? You see, once again, this hope prepares and leads us to live each day as we should.

And that brings us to a second aspect of fixing our hope. True Christian hope truly directs how we live. True Christian hope is not just theoretical or ideal, but actual. Go to verse 5, "Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD." True Biblical hope leads us to walk in the light of the Lord—in His truth.

Just a few chapters on in this book we come to some more familiar words. Chapter 9, verse 2, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them." Then,

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." (9:6-7)

God instructed to Israel to walk in His light in a number of ways. For example, there was the practical, tangible picture of it during the wilderness wandering. God went ahead of them, guiding them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night (cf. Exodus 13:21). The people were to believe and follow, to live in His light. And then the Psalmist gave us the familiar words, "[God,] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Jesus is the light of the world (cf. John 3:19, 9:5, 12:46). Through faith in Him we are children of light and are to walk in the light (cf. Ephesians 5:6-12; 1 John 5:5-7). The apostle Paul tells us that "the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Eph. 5:9).

God tells us in Scripture of many specific ways this hope is to direct and lead us. Think of just two. Paul wrote to his fellow worker Titus,

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, *looking for the blessed hope* and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:11-14)

Now there are at least a couple of sermons in these brief verses. In summary, the grace and hope of God’s salvation, if indeed it is our hope, should lead us to godly living, to looking for, to praying for the return of Christ.

The second example is in 1 John 3,

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this *hope* fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (2-3)

Fixing our hope on God, specifically fixing our hope on seeing Him when He returns and being changed, being given our everlasting bodies, *will*—not can or even should, but *will* lead us to purify ourselves. It will lead us to not being satisfied with being saved and on our way to heaven, but meanwhile getting on with the things of this life. It will lead us to always be sensitive to, to never tolerate sin in our lives but, relying on the Holy Spirit within us, to grow in godliness, in obedience and purity.

Conclusion.

True hope is indispensable. It is indispensable to being fit, to being ready to celebrate the birth of Christ as we should. It is indispensable to being fit to live each day as we should.

What is the state of your hope today? Perhaps you have never really come to trust God, to rely on the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ for you and, so, do not have this hope. In his last writings, Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw tells us,

“The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led, instead, directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith.”

He was without faith, without hope, without God. True hope is indispensable.

You can have real hope. God tells us in 1 John 5,

“[And] the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (11-13)

Jesus came into this world on that first Christmas to be the world’s Savior, to be your Savior. You can trust Him now, and have true hope this Christmas and every day for the rest of your life.

If you know Christ as your Savior, what is the state of your hope today? If you are already caught up in the rush of buying and partying, of the sparkle and glitter without the compass of the hope in Christ, take time now to fix your hope.

- Stop.
- Change your focus.
- Keep Christ’s birth at the center.
- Keep Christ’s return in front of you.

Thank God now for His indescribable gift, and determine to walk in the light.

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