

So Advent is a season of waiting isn't it. It's the countdown to Christmas. It's looking forward with anticipation to Christ's arrival. And Advent teaches us that God is good and he always fulfils his promises over us. That's what we see as the link is joined between the Old Testament and the New. Humanity rebels, God loves so much that he promises a Messiah, a saviour, a rescue plan for humanity, and he doesn't fail in his promise.

God teaches us, Advent teaches us to wait. And in this first week of Advent we think about how we can have hope while we are waiting. Right now in yours and my daily life, how can we cling on to hope in the midst of struggle? , when you are waiting for something? Now hope is future oriented faith. Hope is looking towards the future. Hope is one day longing to be married, and then when you're married there maybe is a hope to have children, and then as the children grow up you hope that they will leave you eventually, and eventually bring back grandchildren. Hope keeps us moving forward , and that's what Advent is.

I wonder like me do you have an advent calendar in the house? Alison always buys them for the boys, so I'm wondering what's going to happen this year, with Josh being away for a bit of Lent, will I get to eat his chocolate? And as we eat chocolate each day, we realise we are getting closer to the big day. But for most aspects to our lives, this isn't how things work, is it? For most things in life, there's no date attached. Most of things we hope for, don't have dates attached so we don't know when it's going to be. So we don't know when we might get that job offer, we don't know when we might get better from a recent illness, we don't know when we might have that relationship where everything clicks. So we all have places in our lives where we don't have a not yet, but more a not ever. So how can we have hope in the waiting?

God has built into us that longing for hope. He has created us to hope for things. Hope is why I will continue to support Man City even today when they are to face the mighty Liverpool after a string of defeats. Hope is what keeps us going. It's been said that you can live 2 months without food, you can live a week without water, and you can live a few minutes without oxygen, but you cannot live a moment without hope. It's essential for life.

I can remember the first year with the team in Valls in Spain, and Victor the pastor loves the outdoors. He particularly like caving. And he took us into the incredibly narrow passage way underground. And in order to get out of this section you had to squeeze through a very narrow passage. There was rock above you and below you. And it was only because Victor and others pushed through that I felt some aspect of hope that I wouldn't die in there and that I would get out alive. And in those moments, I felt hopeless. I didn't know how to get out. Hopelessness in life can feel like that. It feels dark with no way of getting out, but then when you see the light that's beyond hope arises.

That's why Hope is the first aspect of Advent. Darkness is a symbol for hopelessness. But hope comes into the darkness.

And God will always bring us hope. Here's what the Isaiah the prophet declared about the future. Isaiah 9 "The people walking in darkness

have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of deep darkness

a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given,

and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace

there will be no end".

So, Isaiah is saying that one day the darkness will be interrupted with a light that will change everything, it will come through the Son of God, a child, the Messiah, that will be a light of hope for all humanity.

Folks if you want to escape the hopelessness of this world, then you need to find Jesus. Because Jesus is the ultimate hope. You need to have someone that you put your hope in. You need someone who is solid and secure, because when things become shaky in life, we need someone who your hope can be anchored in. He is the hope of the world.

Who your hope is in, is greater than what you hope for in this world. I have seen people's lives dramatically turn around when they have placed their hope in the person of Christ rather than the things in life that may or may not happen.

And this is where Romans 5 becomes the foundation for those of us who have placed our hope in Jesus. So for the rest of the time I have, I want to talk to you about the ultimate hope that came that first Christmas. Because again as we think about our lives, if we have come to that living hope, then we know the freedom it can bring to others who haven't yet put their hope in Jesus. It gives us a reason to invite others along to our worship gatherings over these coming weeks so that they might hear the Gospel message and respond.

So for each of us, how can we have hope in this life. Well in Jesus, here's what it brings:

1. I have hope in Christ because I am absolved of my past.

If you are in Christ, you need to know that your past has been forgiven. It's been cleared. Paul says this in verse 1, "since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". So the best way that I understand Justified is this –

“just as if I’d never sinned”. The moment that you put your hope in Jesus Christ, it’s as if you have never sinned. He’s taken all your sin, all your crimes, all your shame, all your guilt, and he wipes the slate clean. It’s all gone. That is such good news for this Christmas season. Hebrews 8:12 reminds us just how far God has taken this – he says “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins”. Tell me, when was the last time you completely forgot what someone else had done to you in the past? The truth is that you might forgive, but you rarely forget. But that’s the incredible difference with our Father God, when he wipes the slate clean, it truly is as Paul says as if I have never actually sinned.

2. But that’s not the only hope I have, because I’m also assured of my future.

Paul says in verse 2 of Romans 5, “we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God”. You see not only has God in his mercy wiped away all the debt, but then in his grace gives us eternal life. That’s what we don’t deserve. And so Paul says we can boast in the glory of God knowing that one day we will be with him forever. And because his promises are secure we don’t have to face death with fear, but we can face death with confidence knowing that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ our future is assured. I think it was John Wesley who once said, “Our people die well”, meaning that we die trusting Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. Not in a list of achievements and good deeds, but through the death of Jesus, by grace alone, right with God and ready for heaven. Our hope in Christ means our future is assured.

3. The third reason we can truly have hope is because God is working now, even in our struggles.

Paul says in verse 3, “we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope”. In the time that we wait here on this earth, remember that it’s not wasted. God is building perseverance and character and he’s building hope. Through the work of the Holy Spirit he is making us more like Christ, and through that process God reveals to us all the things that we put our hope in which will not sustain us. And we can put our hope in things like money and success and relationships and lots of other things, but what the Holy Spirit wants us to know is that those things will not hold us – our ultimate hope must be in Christ. He’s the only one that can sustain us when things in this life are hard.

So today I know that for some of you, you have lost that sense of hope in the Lord, because many other things have got in the way – things that you are hoping FOR to happen, breakthroughs in your lives and your families that you long to see to give some sense of hope. I’d encourage you today in this period of Advent waiting, to know that God always comes through on his promises. So use this period of Advent to put your hope in Jesus alone. Whatever those things are that you are hoping FOR, leave them

1st December 2024 Romans 5:1-11 Longing for hope in our lives

where they are, and put all your hope in Jesus instead. Keep your hope alive, by keep showing up for worship at every opportunity, keep showing up for housegroup or bible study, keep showing up for fellowship with each other here, keep showing up daily in the word of God – maybe this Advent you could commit to reading 1 chapter a day of Luke's Gospel between today and Christmas Eve, and by Christmas Eve you will have read the entire book – show up daily in his word so that you never lose hope, keep showing up in serving God, keep showing up in your giving to his work, and I can guarantee that as you do that you will realise how much more enriching is your hope for the future, instead of wasting it on the things that fill you with worry, fear and exhaustion.

So as I leave this time, I am going to pray that you put your ultimate hope on Jesus this Advent. As you search your heart if there's never been a moment where you have trusted in Jesus and you have received his forgiveness and you see yourself surrendering to him, then let today be that moment. Because the greatest thing that God could do for you in the lead up to this Christmas is to take care of your past and give you the promise of a future with him – and that happens as you trust in Jesus. [Thank you for loving me, thank you for sending your son Jesus to die for me, right now I receive your forgiveness, I receive your peace, I receive your new life, I want to walk with you, to place my hope in you. Thank you for saving me]

And so Father we pray for a renewed hope in all of us today. As we put our hope in you, we would see how you are working in the places that we are waiting for. And I pray that you will work in each person to help us see the hope that comes as we release all those longings and desires and place everything in you. Amen