



Fixing Your Hope
Text: Isaiah 2:1-5
Series: Advent 2018 [#1]
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl
December 2, 2018

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 familiar and 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.” Too late for that this year!
- “I hope I get a Sony PlayStation 4 Pro or an Xbox One X 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.”

Hope. 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 sometimes are puzzled by the concept of hope in an Advent sermon 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.”¹

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, even more, not to hope is a sin against God’s goodness.²

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.’”³

Today we are thinking about *Fixing Your Hope*. As you may have guessed or already figured out, I will use that phrase with more than one dimension or meaning today with respect to hope, including to repair or correct, to make an accurate determination and also to establish or make firm. 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.

Let’s begin by setting the scene, by getting a fix on Isaiah’s message of hope. Isaiah’s ministry was to Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen away from God and fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., during Isaiah’s ministry in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Judah was following the same steps as the northern ten tribes in turning away from God. The first chapter of Isaiah is God's assessment and condemnation of that unfaithfulness. He said that...

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

These were strong words to sinful people. There is a brief indication of future restoration in verses 26 and 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 which God gave Isaiah.

To begin with, it is a hope that is certain. Look at verse 2 In Isaiah chapter 1, page 784 in the church Bibles.

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.”

Note, first, that God said it *shall* come to pass...it *shall* be established...it *shall* be exalted... and all the nations *shall* flow 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, the Bible tells us, “the truth,”⁴ from God who, the Bible also tells us, cannot lie.⁵ 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 is part of 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 in Isaiah and other passages, I see this statement here as a reference to the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth which will come before the final battle with and defeat of Satan and sin and the beginning of the eternal state.

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,

"Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, 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 because “He [Christ] will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.”

They will be going not only to learn about God, but also to learn to “walk in His paths,” that is, to follow Him, obey Him. To walk in, to live in God’s *paths*, 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” (verses 4-5, NASB). 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” (verse 5, NASB, ESV).

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, chapter 3, where starting in the middle of verse 12 God says, “O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths. The LORD stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people” (verses 12b-13). What was true then is also true now in many ways in our own day.

In that day there will be a certain hope of many from all parts of the globe who will be transformed, but 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, many will be transformed 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 back in chapter 2.

“He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

What do you think of Isaiah’s statement? Is it really a certain hope, or an ideal, 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. Want a new book to read? Try this title, *What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given*

the Experience of the Past Million Years? That's quite a title. But the book actually is a very short read. The whole book consists of a one-word answer to the title's question. The word? "Nothing."⁶ The message is, "*There is no hope!*"

Others, including some in and around the church, quickly spin to an application of this verse apparently without 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 in that time and they still will have disagreements and conflicts with one another. Thirdly, Christ's rule will be the *supreme court*, that is, 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 Isaiah the prophet and his people.

Getting A Fix On Our Hope.

Now we need to turn to ourselves and our hope today, to getting a fix on our hope. True hope is indispensable to us. 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 chapter 1 beginning at verse 3,

“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” (verses 3-5, NASB).

This is our hope as the people of God! 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 states the same theme as it tells us God “has loved us and given us eternal comfort and *good hope* by grace” (verse 16, NASB). Then back in the Old Testament in the midst of unbelievable atrocities, the prophet Jeremiah was able to say,

“‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I *hope* in Him!’”⁷

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” (NASB),⁸ that is, when Christ returns. 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 to take the church home?

You see once again that this hope prepares and leads us to live each day as we should. Things will not always continue on as they are now. This present world, including all the

things, relationships and feelings that we have or do not have are not final for us, but our certain future with Christ is forever.

And that brings us to a second aspect of getting a fix on our hope. True Christian hope truly directs how we live. If we say we hope in Christ and Christ and His truth does not direct how we live, how can we say our hope is really fixed on Him? True Christian hope is not just theoretical or ideal, but actual.

Go to verse 5 back in our text, Isaiah chapter 2, “O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD.” True Biblical hope leads us to walk in the light of the Lord—to live in, according to and following 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” (NASB). 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” (NASB).

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.⁹ 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.”¹⁰

Jesus is the light of the world.¹¹ The Bible tells us that through faith in Him we are children of light and are to walk in the light.¹² The apostle Paul tells us that “the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (NASB).¹³

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 that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the

blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”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 chapter 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” (verses 2-3, NASB).

Fixing our hope on God, specifically fixing our hope on seeing Christ when He returns and being changed, being given our everlasting bodies, *will*, not can or even should, but *will* lead us to do our part in purifying ourselves. You see, 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 not 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.

So again, what is the state of your hope today? There are many who 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 true hope.

In his last writings, Irish playwright and atheist George Bernard Shaw has one of his characters in his play *To True To Be Good* tell us,

“Determinism is gone, shattered, buried with a thousand dead religions, evaporated with the clouds of a million forgotten winters.

The science I pinned my faith to is bankrupt: its tales were more foolish than all the miracles of the priests, its cruelties more horrible than all the atrocities of the Inquisition. Its spread of enlightenment has been a spread of cancer: its counsels that were to have established the millennium have led straight to European suicide. And I—I who believed in it as no religious fanatic has ever believed in his superstition! For its sake I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now look at me and behold the supreme tragedy of the atheist who has lost his faith—his faith in atheism, for which more martyrs have perished than for all the creeds put together. Here I stand, dumb before my scoundrel of a son; for that is what you are, boy, a common scoundrel and nothing else.”¹⁵

Think of this character in the play—yes, he is just a character—but his is a man like so many others—without faith, without hope, without God.

True hope is indispensable. Each of us, all of us can have real hope. God tells us in 1 John chapter 5,

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

Jesus came into this world on that first Christmas to be the world’s Savior, to be our Savior. Trusting Him now brings true hope this Christmas and every day.

If you know Christ as your Savior, one more time, 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 with true hope.

-
- ¹ R. W. Church. *Sermon IV. Hope*. 1885. Published by Macmillan and Co., 1901. In Project Canterbury Project.
<<http://anglicanhistory.org/england/church/advent/04.html>>. Accessed 13 November 2018.
- ² R. W. Church.
- ³ John Piper. *What Is Hope?*
<<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-is-hope>>. 6 April 1986. Accessed 13 November 2018.
- ⁴ See, for example, Isaiah 65:16; John 14:6, 17; Ephesians 4:21; 1 John 5:6, 20.
- ⁵ See, for example, Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18.
- ⁶ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. *The Books of Bokonon, The Fourteenth Book*.
<<https://www.cs.uni.edu/~wallingf/personal/bokonon.html#fourteenthbook>>. Accessed 13 November 2018.
- ⁷ Lamentations 3:24.
- ⁸ 1 Peter 1:13, NASB.
- ⁹ Exodus 13:21.
- ¹⁰ Psalm 119:105.
- ¹¹ John 3:19, 9:5, 12:46.
- ¹² Ephesians 5:6-12; 1 John 5:5-7.
- ¹³ Ephesians 5:9, NASB.
- ¹⁴ Titus 2:11-14.
- ¹⁵ George Bernard Shaw. *Too True To Be Good: A Political Extravaganza*. Guetenberg of Australia e-Book.
<<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300591h.html#e01>>. Posted April 2013. Accessed 13 November 2018.

© 2018, Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.
All rights reserved.

Scripture marked (NASB) taken from
the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995
by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from
The Holy Bible, English Standard Version ® (ESV®),
copyright © 2001 by Crossway,
a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from
the Holy Bible, New Living Translation,
copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation.
Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.,
Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.