

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

HOPE.PEACE.LOVE.JOY

Week 1: HOPE Discussion Questions

1. What do you understand by the word 'hope'.
2. What is it about today's world that makes you most long for hope?

Read Isaiah 9:1-5

3. Can you think of any times God has humbled people in order to bring them to a better place?
4. Look at the promises God made to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3. How do you see this passage fitting into those promises?
5. When has God previously delivered his people from oppression?

Read Isaiah 9:6-7

6. How is God's promise of hope unexpected?
7. Of the titles given to this Messiah-child in v6, which is the most attractive to you personally, and why?
8. Read 2 Sam 7:12-16. What composite picture do we gain of God's messianic king when we read it alongside today's passage?
9. Looking at the description in v6-7, to what extent can we already see it as fulfilled and to what extent does this prophecy still need to be fulfilled?
10. **1 Peter 3:15** says: 'But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect' How does today's passage contribute to your personal understanding of the Christian hope? How would you respond if a non-believing friend asked you why you are a Christian?
11. Spend some time praying in response to God's Christmas gift: hope.

Christmas Gifts: Hope

Isaiah 9:1-7

Opener: Definitely time to start on the Christmas shopping (or nudge your spouse, if they are the designated shopper in your family.) What are you hoping someone will give you? My ultimate Christmas present as a child? My Mum built me a planet!

Today we start a series on Christmas gifts, and we are looking at several amazing gifts that God gave to humankind when he sent his Son into the world 2000 years ago.

As many of you know, the church celebrates different things at different times of the year, and the lead-up to Christmas is called Advent, which is Latin for 'coming' or 'appearing'. We reflect on the coming of Jesus 2000 years ago, but also we are prompted to look forward to his second coming.

The four 'Christmas gifts' we are looking at are Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. They have long been the themes of the weeks of Advent, so we are using that to help us reflect on the hope, peace, joy and love that Jesus brought into the world at his first coming and that we will see in their purest form at his second coming. And so today, we are thinking about hope.

Why 'hope'? What good is it? Why do we need it? It's pretty obvious, isn't it? Because in this world, hope is in desperately short supply. We live under the constant threat of the collapse of the environment, the economy, the fragile peace in the Middle East; we read every day of the unspeakable things that people do to one another; we no longer let our kids walk home from school – like we did – because of Sian Kingi and Daniel Morcombe. Need hope? You bet we do!

That is nothing new though. God's people have often been in a situation where they needed hope to get them out of the gloom that surrounded them. One prime example was in 734BC. The Israel of King David's day has long been divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judea. Assyria is the heavyweight empire, exerting its dominion over the known world. The Assyrians were open to making peaceful deals – you just had to pay them lots of money and do what they said. But if you refused, they were known to be extremely brutal and cruel, and who could stop them?

Judea now faces not just the dreadful Assyrians, but also an invasion from other neighbouring countries. That is gloomy enough! Being invaded by a hostile army is such a terrible thing to befall a nation! But even worse is the reason behind it. The book of Isaiah started out with God recalling how badly the people had let themselves go. They have wandered away from him like lost sheep. They have turned aside to worship idols. And so in Chapter 5 he has whistled the other nations the way you might whistle a dog to do your bidding. The other nations will be the instrument God uses to punish his people. That's terrifying! But even worse is that they have earned it by their rejection of the king of kings.

And yet now, we see this amazing prophecy of change in ch 9. It is a passage that teaches us about the nature of hope.

So what does hope look like?

In v1-5, we see that hope is like waiting for the sun.

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In v1-5, we see that hope is like waiting for the sun. This is such a deep darkness, it will take an amazing light to melt it away. And that is precisely what God promises.

9 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

The light will consist of God's blessing in 4 ways:

- 1) **V3 – the nation will be enlarged.** (Diminished pop'n due to 'replanting' BUT grows as people put faith in Christ)
- 2) **V3 – God will increase their joy.** Notice how even though these promises deal with the future from Isaiah's vantage point, he uses past tense. That is how certain are the promises of God. You can take it as a given. You can build your house on God's promises. **4 TIMES** in this verse, joy or rejoice is used. The coming light will be good news of great joy for all God's people. Why? Because of what comes next:
- 3) **V4 – God will deliver them from oppression.** God has delivered his people in the past from terrible oppression: Egypt, Midian etc etc. But the coming deliverance will make those pale by comparison.
- 4) **V5 there will be unprecedented peace.** Ever since God's people Israel were born from the Red Sea after God brought them out of Egypt, they have needed an army. The current political situation makes the necessity obvious. But God promises there will be peace. Peace so thorough and permanent that the army will be out of a job! Their uniforms – reminders of war and bloodshed, will be burned.

Growth...joy..freedom...peace. But HOW!?! How can God make such claims? He has already dropped a hint in v1-2.

Just as WE are the first to see the light of the new dawn in Australia, so the hope of God will dawn first in Zebulun and Naphtali: Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan...They were regions that had known foreign oppression first-hand. They were even despised by their own countrymen for the non-Jewish influences that had taken hold there. But now they will see the light first. God will honour them... they will see a great light.

...places like Nazareth, in Zebulun...Cana in Galilee...Capernaum on the border of Zebulun and Naphtali.

These are the exact places where Jesus would later teach about himself as the Messiah, where he would do his first miracles, where he would base his ministry. THE LIGHT OF GOD'S HOPE IS THE LIGHT OF CHRIST. UNTIL THEN, THE PEOPLE ARE WAITING FOR THE SUN.

Illustration: Camping with no sleeping bag >>> WAITING FOR THE SUN! It was a sure hope: I knew it was going to happen...But how I longed for it!

Application:

- 1) This is great news for the world-weary. For people who read the newspaper and get distressed at the evil in the world/ for people who are made to feel small by the unbelievers in their family/ for people who are depressed about their own sinfulness.

GOD HAS PROMISED HOPE AND IN JESUS GOD HAS DELIVERED.

GOD HAS PROMISED LIGHT AND HE HAS SENT THE SUN

So, what does hope look like? Hope looks like waiting for the sun - S-U-N

But it also looks like waiting for the Son- S-O-N. We see that especially in v6-7

⁶ 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 Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

You might expect a warrior king, but God loves surprising us. He promises a baby. But he is born to rule.

Wonderful (supernatural) counsellor

Mighty God (he will be divine! EPEX re Jewish monotheism)

Everlasting Father – Later, the one who was prophesied about here would say, "I and the Father are one." (Jn 10:30)

Prince of Peace – hard to believe that God could make such a promise when war is all around Judea...and yet he does.

He will rule on David's throne forever.

This last bit connects everything Isaiah has been saying to the shadowy figure of the Messiah (EPEX 2 Sam 7)

AND of course we know that this Messiah, Jesus, is the core of hope for all God's people!

Wonderful Counsellor – able to do amazing miracles, and yet offering comfort and compassion and hope

Mighty God – We worship him in the same breath as the Father

Everlasting Father – I and the Father are one

Prince of peace – he has brought about reconciliation between God and humankind

He is God's forever king, the king of God's Kingdom

GOD HAS PROMISED HOPE AND IN JESUS GOD HAS DELIVERED.

GOD HAS PROMISED LIGHT AND HE HAS SENT HIS SON

Illustration:

Application: All that Isaiah promised came true through Jesus. But from OUR point in history, we can see so much more.

1 Pt 1:3 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Titus 2:13 - we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

1 Pt 1:13 - Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Jesus' FIRST coming is the guarantee of his SECOND coming

JESUS' resurrection is the guarantee of OUR resurrection

This Christmas season, as we remember the hope that Jesus brought 2000 years ago, let's face the future, knowing that the same certain hope holds good for the future as well.

GOD HAS PROMISED HOPE AND IN JESUS GOD HAS DELIVERED.

GOD HAS PROMISED LIGHT AND HE HAS SENT HIS SON