

Advent 1 (Nov 29/20) Hope: The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this!

Read Isaiah 8:11 – 9:7

1. In the sermon Tim shared a little of the historical background of this passage. A divided nation of Israel under the thumb of oppression from Assyria, the southern kingdom (Judah) rejects an alliance with the north (Israel) against Assyria which sparks war, a famine has descended upon the land, the resulting food insecurity is hastening the movement of wealth to fewer and fewer, an economic cliff is looming. In these grievous circumstances hope has eroded. From the passage what are the symptoms of this erosion of hope?

(12) Fear

(12) A belief in conspiracy theory.

(11) A moral decay. They walk in the darkness – meaning to participate in / to contribute to the darkness.

(19, 21) A spiritual decay – they inquire after mediums and spiritists – they grumble against God contemptuously.

(21) An anger at their leaders – why aren't they doing more to get us out of this?

(22) Gloom – there is deepening despair.

2. In what ways have the events of the past year eroded hope in our society? What do you see as the symptoms of this erosion of hope?

This is a personal reflection question. I wouldn't spend too much time here – you could easily fill all your time with reflecting on current events. Spend enough time such that people enter into the hopelessness of our current situation that is related to what the original listeners would have been experiencing such that the message of hope of this text will resonate with us and animate our hope for the future of the messianic kingdom.

Tying the answers from question 1 above to current symptoms of hopelessness may help guide the discussion.

3. (9:1-7) What is the particular content of the hope God promises to his people through Isaiah? Contemporary Christianity often proclaims a spiritual otherworldly hope – why do you think we have become less biblical in our understanding of hope? What impact has this had on our message and our mission?

There will be light shining into the midst of the darkness – a complete reversal of current circumstances.

There will be a joy that is not tied to circumstance – a joy related to the joy of the harvest for those who face food insecurity – a joy related to the dividing of spoil that follows victory for a people who have had their lands raided and pillaged.

There will be the breaking of the rod of oppression, the lifting of the yoke of burden. They will be free from their enemies.

There will be not only the cessation of this conflict, but the cessation of all conflicts.

There will be the promised reign of righteousness, peace, and justice for those who are facing no peace, inequality and injustice.

The reality is that this is a material, all-encompassing earthly hope which is so different from the spiritual ethereal otherworldly hope of heaven that is often focused upon in Christian teaching and proclamation.

I would encourage you to explore a little in your group this disconnect between this earthly material hope the bible proclaims with the spiritual otherworldly hope contemporary Christianity proclaims.

I would suspect some of it has to do with the fact that God's timing is so far beyond our timing – this promises were made almost 3000 years ago and where is the messianic kingdom?

The letting go of this material earthly hope has meant we focus strongly on the work of evangelism – accepting Jesus as your Savior so you can go to heaven when you die – rather than the other implications of the messianic kingdom that brings peace, justice, and righteousness to every aspect of life. Hope of this nature invites to both evangelism and social justice.

4. Isaiah is so confident that God will bring about this future that he speaks of it in the past tense. Why is he so confident?

It is rooted in the character and power of God.

The Zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Zeal has the sense of becoming intensely red as the face is flushed with the surge of emotions within – the passions that surge within the being of God are directed toward this one end – everything at God's disposal is given over to this one purpose – the fulfillment of the messianic kingdom in which all things come under his messianic reign.

Again it would be helpful to articulate God's timing not being our timing – it took 700 years from this promise for the promised Messiah to be born – how much longer to the fullness of it's completion is beyond our understanding.

5. How would it impact how we respond to and live through our current circumstances if we possessed this hope?

There will be no gloom for her who was in anguish – while we will grieve our present circumstances they can't pull us under as a result of this hope.

We live in confidence that this future will be brought about – so this future will shape what we work toward – how we vote – where we give our money – how we interact with others.

In his book surprised by hope N.T. Wright invites us to worship the coming King – for we become what we worship and in that way we will reflect the values and the goals of the messianic kingdom – love, forgiveness, and service of others.

Read Matthew 4: 12-17

6. In the sermon Tim shared that the way we lay a hold of this hope is through repentance (an acknowledgement that we can't save ourselves and that we not only live in darkness we participant / contribute to the darkness). How does this posture of repentance impact how we await Jesus' second coming to make all things new?

In humility we reject triumphalism that we (the church) will bring about the kingdom on our own – no – that will require the intervention of God.

In humility we will reject the myth of progress (secular hope) – that through human wisdom, strength, power, and ingenuity we are slowly but surely moving toward some utopian future – no – that will require the intervention of God.

In humility we reject the belief that we are better than others such that if "they" (whoever the they is) were just not around the world would be a better place. We contribute to the darkness as much as anyone else.

In humility we will be reliant upon the direction of God and the work of the Spirit rather than on our wisdom, our knowledge, our way.