

Unexpected Hope

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

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Proverbs 23, verse 18 says, there is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. The psalmist says, yes, my soul, find rest in God, for my hope comes from him truly. He is my rock, he is my fortress, and I will not be shaken. Isaiah says, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. Hope is a powerful thing. Hope is what sustained Israel when they were in Egypt in bondage for over 400 years. Hope is what allowed the apostles to endure such great persecution.

During the early church, as we were reading about in the Book of Acts, hope is what motivated thousands of soldiers to storm the beach of Normandy on June 6, 1144. Hope is what gets you out of bed every single morning, and hope is what every sports fan has at the beginning of the season, except for Detroit Lions fans. We don't even have hope then. I know it's another year.

Another year. If you're here today or you're watching online or you're listening on the radio, if you have ever lost hope in your life for even a moment, I mean completely lost hope, then you know how important hope is. Hope is this desire, this expectation or belief that something good is actually going to happen.

It's a belief that it's going to get better than it is right now, the belief that in this moment, it is going to get better in the future. And hope doesn't rely on scientific fact. Hope doesn't need something that can be proven without a shadow of a doubt. Hope is a feeling. Hope is an inner belief. Hope is a desire for change. As we enter the Christmas season this year, some of you have gathered today with tremendous hope.

Maybe you're watching online or listening, and you have a lot of hope for the next few weeks. You're excited about getting together, maybe with family and friends that you only see during the holiday season, and so you're hopeful for that. Some of you the kids or the teenagers, even some adults are hopeful for what you're going to unwrap on Christmas morning. You're excited. You anticipate that moment. Maybe some of you are filled with hope because you're newly married this year, and so this is your first Christmas as a married couple, and you can't wait to buy gifts for each other.

Maybe you have a new baby and the excitement that comes with that baby's first Christmas and all of the lights and the noises and the sounds and the smells that you know that baby is going to experience. Maybe this year you're excited because you are on a new adventure. Maybe you have a new job, and so you're hopeful that things are going to get better. But some of you are here today or watching and you are hoping that this year is actually better than previous years.

Maybe you enter this Christmas season and your level of hope is almost at zero. Maybe over the last year you've lost a loved one. And so this is going to be your first Christmas without that special person in your life. And so you are almost dreading that day. Maybe you've hit a rough path financially. And so for you, Christmas is going to be a little thin this year. You're not going to be able to get the gifts for people that you have in the past.

Maybe relationally, you're at an impasse with a family member or a group of people. And so you're not going to be getting together for Christmas because maybe you weren't even invited. Maybe you have lost hope because you are sure that due to your health struggles and your age, that this might be your last Christmas.

The good news is today is no matter where your level of hope is, whether it seems like it's at zero or maybe your hope level is really high, you can leave today after listening to the message, after hearing about the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, that your hope can be filled again. It doesn't need to stay empty, it doesn't need to stay at the level of which it is right now. It is a hope that is available to everyone no matter what your experience is, no matter what you're going through.

Because Christmas is about hope. The entire story is about hope. It's about new beginnings. It's about resetting the stage for everyone. This year, we're going to start a Christmas series that's going to lead us up through Christmas Sunday. And the title of our series is the Unexpected Messiah. Now, I love this title, The Unexpected Messiah. Because the Messiah came into the story of mankind in a way that was most unexpected, didn't he?

It was not the way that people thought the Messiah was going to enter into creation. And do you know what everyone's favorite gift is on Christmas morning? It's that unexpected gift. It's the surprise. It's the one that you certainly didn't earn. You maybe didn't even ask for it. You didn't know you needed it or wanted it, but once you got it, it was the best thing you ever received. That is the gift of Jesus Christ, isn't it? The unexpected messiah.

That thing that we needed more than anything else and we didn't even know that we needed it. It's a gift that he has given to us. And so we're going to talk about the hope that comes through Jesus Christ. Let me pray and then we'll jump into the message today. Heavenly Father, I always find comfort in the fact that you know what every person is going through, those that are physically here in the sanctuary, those that are watching online and joining us that way, those that are maybe listening on the radio and just turned on the station as they were maybe just driving through our area.

Father, nothing happens by chance. And, you know, all of the difficulties and the struggles that people are experiencing in this moment. And so my prayer is that you would bring comfort. You are a God of comfort. You are a God that can give peace, that surpasses understanding. But even beyond those things, Lord, I pray today that you would give us hope, that you would fill our hope meter so that when we leave, we recognize that we have something that we can hold onto regardless of what's happening in the world around us.

We put our hope in you. And so we ask this in Jesus name. Amen. I think to better understand how unexpected this Messiah was and his coming, we need to put ourselves in the minds of a first century Jewish man or woman. And so here's some ruins of kind of first century Judaism and to understand actually what happened and what they were expecting, what they were looking for.

So in order to do that, I want to kind of fill your minds with what would be in the mind of a first century Jewish man or woman. I want you to imagine that you were born into a family that has a rich heritage. As you have grown up, no matter how old you are, you have heard story after story repeatedly of your ancestors, your parents, your grandparents, your great grandparents. All of those stories have been handed down from generation to generation.

And as you get older, you naturally share those stories with your children and your grandchildren and your great grandchildren as well. Collectively, these stories share that you are God's chosen people. As a Jew, as an Israelite person, you know, you believe that God has chosen your people through which he

would reveal Himself to the world. You are playing an important role in the story that God has for humanity, and so you carry some pride with that.

The stories of your ancestors that you read in your holy scriptures, the Old Testament, prove that God is on your side. Many times he has defended you and done miraculous things for you, so much so that even as you look at your calendar multiple times throughout the year, you're celebrating festivals and holidays that mark the remembrance of how God has blessed you, how he has protected you, and how he has rescued you in the past.

As you go to school and you learn about the history of your people, you know that as a nation and as a people group, you've had a lot of ups and downs. You learn about the golden years of when David was King and Solomon was king and the nation of Israel was the most powerful nation on Earth. But you also know the stories of those down seasons, the seasons of bondage, when your people were enslaved by the Egyptians for over 400 Years.

You remember the more recent history of when Assyria came from the north and they would conquer the entire northern kingdom of Israel, and they would exile the people. And of course, you remember the story in 586 BC. When the Babylonians would travel, and they would take over the city of Jerusalem, and they would ransack the temple of your God and they would disperse all of your people around the known earth at that time.

So you have these stories in your head, but every single time there was a down season, every single time your ancestors were disobedient to God, he still loved them. And eventually he would send a deliverer to rescue them, to save them from themselves. And as it stands right now as a first century Jewish man and woman, you and your people are in bondage to a new nation the Romans. And life is difficult, to say the least.

You experience only minimal freedoms right now. There are certain things that you can and can't do. There are certain things you can say and there are certain things you can't say as an Israelite living under Roman rule. Very few of your own people are living comfortably. Most are barely meeting their basic needs the needs of food and water and shelter. There's no such thing as free speech.

There's no such thing as a free market where if you work hard, you can advance yourself, you can earn a good income, you can take care of your family, maybe even set up the next generation that doesn't exist. Every day you wake up, you know it could be your last. If something goes wrong, if there's a revolt, if you're walking in the marketplace, if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, a Roman guard could take your life and there would be no consequences.

But as a Jewish man or woman in the first century, there's one thing that gives you hope. There's one thing that gets you out of bed every morning. There's one story that you hear as you go to synagogue and as you gather with family and friends that gives you hope even in the midst of your misery. And that is the fact that as you read and listen to the ancient texts, there is a promise of a coming Messiah. The promise of a coming messiah.

And so as you go to synagogue, you hear the stories as they're sharing the truth that God is going to send an ultimate deliverer. He is going to send somebody who is going to redeem you from this bondage. And so, even if your life feels hopeless, you still have the hope of the Messiah. Maybe he is going to come and change everything. And so as a first century Jewish man or woman, you ask the question, what is this messiah going to look like?

What are we supposed to prepare our minds and our hearts for? Of course, no one knows for sure. It's just like today. We don't know what the end times are going to look like. And so you have a lot of people that are speculating and guessing what it's going to look like, but nobody really knows for sure. So it was

the same in the first century. What is this Messiah going to look like? What are we supposed to prepare for? So, of course, they looked at the Old Testament text, and here you have the prophecies about the Messiah.

And in the Old Testament, there are over 300 prophecies about this future Messiah or Savior that God was going to appoint to deliver his people from oppression. Let's just look at a few of those so that as a first century Jewish man or woman, you can try to comprehend what you think this person was going to look like. All right, first one comes from Isaiah, chapter eleven, verse one, where Isaiah says, a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a branch will bear fruit.

And so this is the prophecy that we know that the Messiah is going to come from the line of David, from the line of Jesse. And what do we know about David? He was a great military leader and ruler. And so your mind begins to picture this Messiah is going to look like our greatest king ever, king David. The psalmist in chapter two, verses one through six says this why do the nations conspire and the people's plot in vain?

The kings of the earth will rise up, and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed. The Messiah saying, let us break their chains and throw off their shackles. But the one enthroned in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and he terrifies them in his wrath, saying this I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain. Again, the image of a king, of a mighty warrior, a military leader.

Psalms 110, verses two and three. The Psalmist says, the Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion. This Messiah, his scepter is going to be extended, saying, rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing. On your day of battle, arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning's womb. He will have an army that will surround him. And then Zechariah, chapter ten, verses five through seven.

Zechariah prophesies that together they will be like warriors in battle, trampling their enemy into the mud of the streets. They will fight because the Lord is with them, and they will put the enemy horsemen to shame. I will strengthen Judah, God says, and save the tribes of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them.

The Ephraimites will become like warriors and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful. Their hearts will rejoice and the Lord. Is it truly any wonder when you read these prophecies about the coming Messiah, that these people were looking for somebody that was going to come back and restore the nation of Israel? They were looking for this military leader.

The prophecies speak of Jesus coming and conquering kingdoms and conquering nations. It would only make sense that as a first century Jewish man or woman, that you would be thinking to yourself, when the Messiah comes, he is going to restore the nation of Israel and we are going to be freed from the bondage of the Romans. I cannot wait for that day. It gives me hope. This earthly king who restored an earthly nation of Israel back to its golden years.

Of course the religious leaders believed this, the priests, the rabbis, they would teach the people this, that when the Messiah came back, he would deliver us and bring prosperity. There would be excitement for a new earthly kingdom and all of the comforts that go along with that when you are the greatest nation on the planet. Of course, as a Jewish person, you are ready for a break from the difficult life. You are ready for a break from all of the stories that your parents and grandparents have shared with you.

The bondage, the cruelty. But yet how the Messiah would actually come looked quite different. It's no wonder that as a first century Jewish man or woman, we would have missed him as well. It wouldn't

have made sense because instead of this Messiah coming in the clouds with a mighty army and a mighty shout, this unexpected Messiah shows up as a baby. As a baby.

This would be strange enough on its own if this baby was born to a prominent family that maybe was rich and had a lot of influence and lived in the capital city of Jerusalem. OK, maybe this person will be our deliverer. Thinking back to Moses, right, being raised in the house of Pharaoh and being able to deliver the Israelites, but instead this Messiah was born in a barn in Bethlehem.

Podunk Bethlehem would be the best way to describe it during a census to two scared teenagers who are poor and have zero influence. This is the way that the Messiah enters the story. Zero influence, poor teenagers, scared, unsure. Bethlehem in a barn. Let's read that story to be reminded. Luke tells us in chapter two.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Corinius was governor of Syria and everyone went to their own town to register. So Luke tells us Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth and Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David because he belonged to the house and line of David. There is a prophecy that is fulfilled.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born. And after she gave birth to her firstborn a son, she wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them. Does this sound like the story of a king? It sounds more like a story of unfortunate events, doesn't it?

All of the situation that is taking place here. But the world was about to find out that the Messiah wasn't coming. This coming king was not here to establish a new earthly kingdom that might last a few hundred years at best. No, this Messiah was coming to establish a heavenly kingdom that would last for all of eternity. It was beyond their wildest dreams. It was beyond our wildest dreams.

This kingdom wasn't just for the Jews, but it was available for everyone. It no longer mattered what earthly kingdom you were born into or belonged to. Everyone could join in to this heavenly kingdom. The Messiah wasn't coming to fight against or abolish an evil earthly ruler. The Messiah was coming back to attack the root of the problem. That was that the problem of every evil ruler that ever existed.

He was coming to conquer sin and death and the grave. He was coming to defeat the real enemy. Not the Emperor of Rome, but the enemy of our soul. And this was so much better because the new kingdom that he had come to establish was not going to be dependent on man, but on God. Because men will always let you down. Men will always fail.

Eventually they will do something, say something, make a decision that is not in your best interest. And so Jesus came to establish a new kingdom, to give a new hope for everyone. The hope of Jesus was available regardless of your social class. This hope was available regardless of your ethnicity, your failures, your shortcomings.

It didn't matter how old or young you were, regardless of what you have gone through, you're experiencing today, or what you ever will go through. This hope is available to you and to me. Our hope no longer has to be put in earthly things, but it can be put in eternal things. And so today we are reminded that Jesus offers hope to everyone this Christmas season.

He offers hope to the elite of our world and he offers hope to those that our world often turns away. He offers hope to those who have lost hope in this world. He offers hope to the hopeless. Jesus has shared

with us a new way of life. And this new way of life is lived from the inside out. Our hope doesn't rest in external circumstances. Our hope rests in the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

We don't have to put our hope in a political party or some social program to fix what's going on. Instead, we can put our hope in the unchanging, the one, the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Our hope can come from within, not from somebody else. For you and I can have hope beyond this life, beyond what we can see and taste and hear and smell this Christmas season.

May we all be reminded to put our hope in Emmanuel, which means God with us. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, it's easy enough to understand this with our minds that our hope should be put in you. But I know that there are many hearts that come broken today.

They are filled with pain and hurt and sadness. And so even though mentally this may make sense this morning, it is very hard to live this out. And so I pray that you would give us strength, that you would give us the insight and the wisdom and the ability to put our hope in you, the unchanging one, that even though we may find ourselves in a difficult circumstance today, that we can trust you.

For you are Emmanuel, god with us. You do not leave us. You do not abandon us. You do not force us to walk this life alone. So for those that are experiencing a season of hopelessness right now, may you just wrap yourself around them. May they feel your embrace. May they be filled with hope. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.