

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**November 26, 2023. "Advent: The Promise of Hope."**

### **I Intro.**

We've just passed Thanksgiving and we're headed towards Christmas. Things are running at full speed and we want you to be a part of this great community. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

### **II Sunday.**

It's the first Sunday of Advent. Our journey towards Christmas. Advent is not actually a celebration of Christmas, but rather a time of waiting expectantly for the coming of the Christ. This can be kind of a weird season for us...and that's okay. This time of year we're always so focused on gifts, planning gatherings, thinking about what our Christmas will look like, we don't think about it also being a season of expectation. We know Christmas is about Jesus. But everything gets all mashed together. We really just want a month of Christmas, everything all at once, and we forgot what it was like for the people who lived at the time of the birth of Jesus. They had been promised a savior, a messiah, who would come and free them from the captivity they were in. But it involved waiting. And NOBODY waits well. Advent is a time for us to learn to wait well. To live in expectation for the coming of the Christ. It's in this time of waiting, we have our character built by living for the promise of hope, joy, peace, and love. And today...we celebrate the promise of hope.

We're going to hit these two major themes in our series title, and then dive into scripture.

**The theme is; "The PROMISE of Hope". What does 'promise' mean to you?**

**How have you experienced promises, both good and bad, in the past?**

**And an age old word– What does hope mean to you?**

**How has the idea of hope helped you in your spiritual walk?**

The scripture passage to start this series is an odd one. It's in the fun book of Lamentations.

Lamentations is a collection of five poems of highly stylized, formally designed liturgy of feeling and expressing sadness. It's a ritual of corporate mourning. The Israelites were in captivity, and their nation no longer existed. Lamentations gave the people a way to come together and normalize their grief and pain. It's an important work and process. We used Lamentations 3 for the message. Read **3:1-20** first and answer the following questions. Then read **3:21-29** and answer the same questions.

**What jumped out to you about this passage?**

**What did this passage say to you about life?**

**What do you see about both despair and discouragement, and how hope is born?**

First, a quick word about the word promise, then we'll get to hope. Promise can be a complicated word for us. We may have had people close to us break a promise, and it caused damage to the relationship. We're still carrying around the hurt and scars. If we're honest we're also guilty of making a promise to someone and breaking it ourselves. And we're carrying guilt and shame around of not keeping our promise. So, promise can be a weighty word. In the world of computer coding a 'promise' is an intentionally created 'saved space' in which some coding is missing. But the promise is before the code is used, that space will be filled with the appropriate missing code. That's such a neat picture of what we want promise to be. A space, intentionally bracketed, with the assurance it will be filled in before it's all done. And so the blank space we create today is for the promise of hope.

Here's what we find from Lamentations that helps us find hope in the midst of our lives.

**1. Considering the faithfulness of God.** This is not to fix your life. But to get you on the other side of whatever it is you are facing. For some reason, the faithfulness of others is defined as them being there when we need them. But for God, we've defined faithfulness of God means God has to make our lives easier. Faithfulness is so much more than just having our problems fixed. God's faithfulness is his ever presentness in our daily lives. This is what the writer was celebrating.

**2. Waiting quietly.** We don't wait well do we? Waiting is not about not being active, or about the work of God. This isn't Cinderella waiting to be rescued. This waiting is an inner state of being. Being transformed is this inner non-anxious, trusting in God, way of being. This is where hope is found and grows. From the ability and skill of learning to be patient and wait on God.

**3. Submitting ourselves.** Surrender is an awful word. No one wants to, or desires to, do this. Submitting is letting go of our own wants and desires for something better. But submitting is built into the promise of hope. To surrender to an understanding and the work of God in our lives. Hope is born out of surrendering to the work being done that will lead us to the place we want to be. In spite of EVERYTHING the writer saw, felt, experienced around him, and the natural desire to grasp and strive for what we think we deserve...the writer submitted. And found hope in doing this.

**4. Daring to hope.** Dare to carve out an empty space, intentionally saving it to be filled with real hope. Don't fill that space with anything else. Trust and expect the promise of hope. To empty yourself of the grief and hurt, creating a 'placeholder' to make room for this promise of hope. We need to know that dare to hope is born out of "yet". "Yet" isn't "no". It's "not yet...but it will". You have to push past the temptation to cave, and get stuck in only lament. Hope is a ridiculously courageous thing to do.  
**Hope is an act of resistance in the face of nothing that gives you hope.**

### **III Challenge.**

So, on this first Sunday of Advent we set out a slightly different understanding of promise. To intentionally empty ourselves of things we need to let go of. And then courageously protect that space for the hope that only God can give us. A hope built on these truths above.

**So, what do you need to let go of to create a 'placeholder' for the promise of hope?**

**What practices could you incorporate in your daily lives to allow you to receive the hope that the coming of The Messiah could bring you?**