

ADVENT 2025 - Hope

INTRODUCTION:

–Deuteronomy 32:15-22

–Share about the difficulties and dark times experienced in 2023-2024: Devoted myself to scripture and prayer in a deeper way, and yet as I grew in my devotion to the Lord, my family and I entered into one of the darkest seasons of life. –It was a hard and dark season for our family, and it just felt like we couldn't catch a break, get ahead, or get a breath. –It was beginning to rob my joy and to distract me. There was a moment that I began to allow the circumstances of my life to become the focus, and that can lead a person down a dark path.

–In a similar way, Deuteronomy 32 describes both the past, present, and future reality of Israel as they begin to reject the God that freed them from bondage. They set their sights on their circumstances, grumbled, complained, and rejected the promises of God, and instead began to worship other gods. The message becomes clear that there would be a consequence for their spiritual adultery—from what they could see, their future would be dark. –What led to these dark times for Israel?

MOVEMENT 1:

1.) **Live as though this is it.** -Ex. 14:11-12: *“You brought us out here to die?”* –Preoccupy yourself with this place along with its deceptive philosophies and antics; when one has a small or distorted view of the future reality of heaven, they chase and gather the treasures of earth as though this will be the only opportunity to enjoy life and have fun, but the pursuit of these treasures is draining and the treasures never satisfy nor fix the weary heart. 2.) **View yourself as the victim.** Ps. 137:1-2: *By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. 2 On the willows there we hung up our lyres.*—Just play the blame game, and don't take ownership or responsibility for living victoriously in your current situation. Live a thankless life and convince others to feel sorry for you. 3.) **Surround yourself with hopeless voices.** (Num. 13:31-33 – discouraging news from the spies) —Nothing better than to spend all day watching the news, scrolling social media to hear everyone's problems, or only hanging out with those who never see the silver lining of dark clouds. 4.) **Live a life of taking over giving.** Judges 17:6 *Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.* Self-interest overtook obedience and generosity. The people only wanted to take and never wanted to give. Taking is the best discipline for selfishness to ensue. 5.) **Treat God and His way as an addition and alternative to your way, only when it works for you.** 2 Kings 17:33 So they feared the Lord but also served their own gods—They didn't abandon God; they just fit Him into their own sinful habits. The most detrimental thing we can do is to simply find a spot for Christ in our life and still try and live according to our fleshly desires when we believe it works best for us. —Just go through the Pharisaic motions of doing Christians things, because it's simply what you're to do...though your heart isn't in it. Living this way is treating Christ as a system and not as a person who invites us into a relationship.

—Over time, these ongoing and destructive patterns led towards darkness, but God had a wonderful plan! The Lord sent Isaiah to sustain them through centuries of darkness and silence...

–**Isaiah 9:2-3,6:** *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil....6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!* –In the midst of darkness, Isaiah recognizes a name full of hope that would bring light. That name would reorient a people walking in darkness. —**Hope isn't wishful thinking, but it's putting our confident trust in Christ as the victor over death so that we can live a resurrected life now and forever.** So what hopeful lifestyle do we see in Christ??

MOVEMENT 2:

1.) **Focus on the unseen** –Mt. 6:19-21, 33: *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where*

neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also....But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.... Live a life of Christ-like love, expanding His Kingdom and working to make earth mimic heaven! 2.) **Be thankful in all things:** Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsie were in the horrific Ravensbrück concentration camp. Their barracks were infested with fleas. Corrie complained, but Betsie insisted: “We must thank God for everything, even the fleas.” Corrie thought she’d gone too far. Months later, they learned the fleas were the *very reason* the Nazi guards avoided their barracks—allowing the women to pray, worship, and read Scripture freely. Corrie laughed through tears and said, “Lord... even the fleas?” The best gifts of God are usually the gifts that we can’t appreciate in the moment, but the ones we’re extremely thankful for in the future as they align our lives with the heart of Christ. **1 Thess. 5:16-18:** *Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* —Live a life of thankfulness. 3.) **Surround yourself with hopeful people.** —The people we allow into our inner circles on an ongoing basis impact our lives. For the Christian, choose wisely those whom you consistently give yourself to. Are they life-givers or life-takers? **Hebrews 10:24-25:** *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hopeful friends will encourage you in hope.* 4.) **Be a generous giver.** “God loves a cheerful giver...” (2 Cor. 9:7). Giving is the practice for a humble heart which takes our sights off of ourselves and puts them on others. Giving is the heart of Christ (Mk. 10:45). “It’s better to give than to receive” (Acts. 20:35). Giving keeps us focused on others more than ourselves, and it’s a practice that reminds us that our provisions come from God not from the things we collect and hoard. 5.) **See Christ as your life;** surrender yourself completely to Him. It’s no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. When Nazi Germany imprisoned the young pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, guards said he would often sing hymns in his cell—loudly. One guard laughed, “Pastor, why sing now? You have nothing!” Bonhoeffer smiled and said, “Oh, but Christ is everything.” Even hours before he was executed, he encouraged fellow prisoners with Scripture. **Col. 3:2-3:** *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* May the Lord be your everything. May you be unshakeable, because your life is built on the unshakeable rock. When you’re shaken to your core, because of the torrents of life may you still be found as reed not swaying in the wind, because Christ is your stability!

Conclusion:

During World War II, cities across Europe were required to enforce blackouts. At night, every window had to be covered, every light extinguished, and every home dark—so bombers couldn’t see where to strike. —One Christmas Eve during a total blackout, a small church gathered quietly for worship. The room was pitch black. No candles. No lamps. Only the sound of people breathing in the dark. Then, right at the beginning of the service, a single person at the front struck a match and lit one small candle. —In the entire sanctuary, this tiny flame pierced the darkness. You could suddenly see faces. Shapes. Movements, hope spread through the room simply because one light appeared. —Then the pastor said: **“This is what Christmas is. The world was dark... but God lit a candle in Bethlehem.”** He then read John 1:5: *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* The entire church began passing the flame from one candle to the next. Within moments, the whole room glowed with light.