

Hope and Expectation

Advent #1

Zechariah 2:10-13

This morning, we are starting the season of Advent. In the Christian church, Advent is the season in which we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas. In order to do this we try to put ourselves in the shoes of the people who were alive prior to and during the time of Jesus' birth. To gain a little more perspective, we want to put ourselves in the Jewish community during this period.

Secondly, we want to relate this to our personal everyday lives as we set time aside to think about what it means to have Jesus in our lives now as we prepare ourselves to take in the full meaning of Christmas.

And thirdly, if we were to stop and think about it, we are in an almost identical situation as the Jews were. Today, Christians are being persecuted all over the world. And even in our nation that some would argue is a Christian nation, Jews and Christians are really the only two religions that are being mocked and put down publicly. In schools, it is fashionable to talk about and embrace the principles and practices of Native American religions, Buddhism, Witchcraft, Islam, and all sorts of other wild beliefs. The only religions censored in schools and in public are Judaism and Christianity.

Governments all over the world are corrupt and poor people all over the world are suffering as a direct result of greed and the lust for power. In every generation, people come on the scene that could easily be identified as Antichrist. Sometimes there is only one evil person that could fulfill this role. In other generations, there could be several different candidates to fill the role. With each instance of evil people rising to power, Christians are encouraged to turn their eyes upward and look for the second coming of Jesus. It is something we need to remind ourselves of constantly. The Jews eagerly hoped for and waited with passionate expectation for their Messiah's coming. We eagerly await the day Jesus will come for us.

And so as we journey through this Advent season, let us continually be thinking about how we should be preparing ourselves to meet Jesus when He comes for us at the rapture.

It seems to me that people seem to be drawn to all the mysterious parts of the Bible. And my children are no exception. When the kids were teenagers, I was teaching a series through Revelation. At the dinner table, Joe and Maribeth started asking a lot of questions about the Second Coming. I tried my best to answer the questions, but I soon became frustrated that I couldn't give them good solid answers. Finally in desperation I fell back on this, "We do not have all the answers we might like, but we do have all we need to know. The best preparation is simply to live each day as if it were your last."

"We tried that once before," they replied, "and you grounded us for a month."

When I say that we should live our everyday lives with hope and expectation, and that we should live everyday as if it were our last, I mean we should wake up every morning and say, "This could be the day You come for me Lord Jesus." The challenge for us is to keep ourselves free from the distractions of this world. In order to build our hope and expectation we must constantly **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS**.

The Scripture we read this morning was written during the period in Israel's history when they returned to Israel after being held captives in Babylon for 70 years. They started to resettle and farm the land. They rebuilt the walls, and they needed to rebuild the temple. After they were carried away into exile by the Babylonians, they were never totally free as a nation again ... until 1947. That's a long time. They were under the authority of the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and at the time of Jesus, they were under Roman rule. In order for us to understand the psyche of the Jews, let's review our history. Around 2000 BC, God called Abraham to come to Israel where he would inherit the land, become a great nation with many descendants, and be a blessing to all humankind. 500 years later, the Hebrews found themselves enslaved by Egypt. God sent Moses to rescue them. With a mighty hand, God set the Hebrews free. Moses led them to freedom, and Joshua led them into the Promised Land to conquer it and settle it. Israel had become a nation. About 500 years after that, around 1000 BC, Israel's greatest and most powerful warrior king, King David, rose to power and brought Israel safety and notoriety. However, Israel; her people, her priests, prophets, and kings, started to forget about God and started to lust after the things of this world. They started to worship false gods. In the year 721 BC the northern part of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. In the year 586 BC Jerusalem and the rest of Israel was conquered by the Babylonians and carried off to Babylon as

captives. 70 years later, they returned to Israel, but from that time on, they were always second-class citizens in their own Promised Land. During these years, they started to study the Scriptures in earnest because they had remembered that God promised to send them an Anointed One, One Who would be their king and deliver them. They hungered to have their own land and control of their own destinies. They were looking for the Messiah to come and defeat the Roman army and Israel would rule the world.

What they missed and what we often miss is that government is not the problem we face. The world is not the problem we face. Even the people who persecute Christians are not the problem. The problem is sin. And to be even more direct about it, it is our struggle against sin that is our real problem. Sin is what enslaved us and continues to threaten us with slavery. Jesus came to solve the sin problem and at His Second Coming, He will take care of the sin problem once and for all eternity. Sin and Satan, its author will be cast into the Lake of fire once and for all. I think that it is right to hope for and expect that one day justice will prevail; that evil will be punished and righteousness rewarded. Governments will be brought down and Jesus will rule the world. We look forward to the Millennium Kingdom and Christ's rule. However, for me perhaps the thing I look forward most to is that I will no longer have to struggle with sin. Even though Jesus has defeated sin on my behalf, I must continue to fight against sin on a moment by moment basis. When Jesus returns and transforms me, sin will no longer affect me in any way. Sin and all its manifestations will be cast into the Lake of Fire. If that thought doesn't get us all cranked up, then we have not been pursuing holiness much. Or perhaps we have only half-heartedly been pursuing holiness. I really am tired of this battle. It seems as if I win a big battle with sin, only to find there are more battles to be fought and won. Heaven will truly be a Sabbath rest. **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS.**

What is it that you hope for? Are your thoughts drawn towards the Christmas presents you hope to receive? Do you hope to win the lottery? Do you hope for a boyfriend or a girlfriend? Do you hope for a better job? I long for the day evil will be defeated once and for all. I long for the day I will be made perfect and will live in heaven with Jesus.

And so that's why the Lord says in verse 10, Shout and rejoice O Jerusalem, for I am coming to live among you. The promise started way back in the Garden of Eden. God created the earth as a place where He and Adam could meet and fellowship. Sin destroyed that place. Later God approached Abraham and said, "I will be your God. You will be my people. You shall prosper in the land and become a great blessing." God made Himself known to Abraham and revealed Himself to Abraham. God lived with the Hebrews as they left Egypt and traveled to Israel. He manifested to them in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. His Shechinah glory lived in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Jesus came to earth in order to live among His people. Truly it was a time to shout and to rejoice and to praise God. Now God lives in us. We have become the temple of God's Holy Spirit. But we hope expectantly for Jesus' return. To think that God lives in us and will once again come in person to take us home is cause for wild shouting and rejoicing. He will come.

So how do we get ready? In verse 11 we see that many people will join together to be the people of God. Jews, Gentiles, poor, rich, male, female, red, yellow, black, and white; all who name the Name of Jesus will be part of that great reunion. We should be about the business of evangelizing our families, friends, classmates, coworkers, neighbors and anyone who is willing to listen. As we evangelize, we demonstrate that we have faith in this reunion.

Again, in verse 12 we are reminded of the location. God promised Abraham that Israel would inherit the land and that anyone who tried to harm the Jews, God would harm them. To see Israel once again become a nation and to once again inhabit the Promised Land in 1947 should cause us to get excited and anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus.

Some of the spirituals born out of slavery were songs that reminded its singers that their hope was not tied up in this world, it is tied up in heaven. It seems that we forget that because we have become much too comfortable in this world and it has become our home. We are not all that anxious to leave this world and go to our eternal homes. And that's why we no longer shout and praise and rejoice in God. We have learned to become so comfortable here. We must once again learn to **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS.**

This Advent season, let's think more about the fact that Jesus is soon going to return and call us to our eternal homes. Those He finds faithful, He will take home. Those He finds unfaithful, will be left behind and ultimately spend eternity in the Lake of Fire.

The Jews of the period eagerly anticipated the arrival of Messiah. We ought to be eagerly anticipating the arrival of Jesus. As we start to prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us try and connect the Hebrews' experience with ours. Many of the people who most desired to see the Messiah come, missed Jesus because they had developed a worldly idea of what Messiah should be. They wanted political power. They were looking for Jesus to come and deliver

them from the Romans. Jesus came to deliver them from Sin, Satan, and Death. They tried to combine their worldly desires and dreams with the idea of Messiah. Jesus made it very clear that He could not be mixed with anything.

It seems to me that we continually try to make Jesus Who we want Him to be. We want Him to heal us, to make us happy, and to meet all our needs. In other words, we want Him to be our Savior. But we often reject Him as our Lord. Many Christians have also become entrenched in politics. And further, they attach God to their politics. I am afraid that many Christians will miss and reject Christ and perhaps even find themselves following Antichrist because Jesus will not stand for the same political issues they believe in. Believe me, Antichrist is going to look politically good to Christians on both the right and the left. I think the Bible is very clear that Antichrist will fool many church people. Caesar will always be Caesar and Christ will always be Christ. We continually remind each other to **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS.**

Jesus is our only source of hope and expectation. Christian hope is much different than worldly hope. Hope to the world is simply wishful thinking. In other words, I hope I get that promotion at work. I hope this boy or girl will like me. I hope I can win the lottery.

But for the Christian, hope is something that will definitely take place. Our hope is tied up in our expectation that God will do what He has promised to do. When we confess our sin, God has promised to forgive us of our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God promised that if we surrender to Him in faith, He will apply the blood and righteousness of Jesus to our lives. Jesus promised that He would prepare a place for us in heaven and that one day He will come back to take us home. You see, our hope is tied up in the love, the character, and the nature of God. What He says, He will do. Jesus also promised us that we will face tribulation in this world. With that promise, He commands us to not lose hope, but instead to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world. He promised us that the Holy Spirit Who lives in us is much greater than the devil who lives in the world.

So as the world becomes more and more united in its hatred towards the nation of Israel, as it socially and physically steps up its attacks against Christians and Jews, we should rejoice because we know that Jesus' return is getting nearer and nearer. This should all cause us to **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS.**

And so how should we approach this Advent season? We should take verse 11 to heart. We need to be silent before God because He is springing into action. This should be a season in which we ponder the truth that Jesus is coming soon to judge the living and the dead. It is a time for us to examine where our hope is. If we put our hope in government, we will be disappointed. If we put our hope in society, we will be disappointed. If we put our hope in success, money, careers, or anything in this world, we will be disappointed. There is only one place that our hope will not let us down. We must put our hope squarely in Jesus. He will not let us down and He will not disappoint us as long as our hope is in the Jesus of the Bible and not some made up idea of who Jesus is. Jesus is coming soon. Will He find us enmeshed in worldly pursuits or will He find us faithfully preparing ourselves to meet Him?

Listen, if we are living life the way Jesus told us to live life, our lives should make absolutely no sense. In other words, if Jesus really did not raise from the dead and if Jesus is not coming for me, then I should be totally insane. If I am forgiving my enemies and there is no Jesus, then I am a fool. If I reject the importance of success, money, and power, and there is no Jesus, then I am stupid. If there is no Jesus, then you should feel sorry for me and my family should have me committed to the insane asylum. Here is a test for all of us. Meditate on this thought during Advent. If there were no Jesus, then would I be crazy? The problem is that there is not much difference between our lives and the lives of our unbelieving friends. The way we give money to God's work should look insane. The way we keep evangelizing our friends and talking about Jesus should make us look insane. Not retaliating but instead forgiving those who have hurt us should make us look insane. The way we embrace those who hate us should make us look insane. Jesus' family thought He was insane. People told the Apostle Paul he was insane. Do people who don't know Jesus look at you, and think you are insane? If we are living and loving like Jesus, we should look insane to the world, and if there is no Jesus, then we should actually be insane. The only way we can live this type of life is to **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS.**

A little girl named Emma summarizes this for us nicely. An examination was being held in little Emma's class at school. The question was asked, "Upon what do hibernating animals subsist during the winter?" Emma thought for a few minutes and then wrote: "All winter long, hibernating animals subsist on the hope of a coming spring."

We cannot be depending on anything else to subsist day by day but our hope in the coming of Jesus to come for us and to take us to our eternal home in heaven. And so I encourage all of us during this Advent season to live with hope and expectation by learning to **TURN OUR EYES UPON JESUS.**