

“Lighting of the Hope Candle”

Advent – Week #1

Hebrews 6:18-20 NLT - 18 So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. 19 This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. 20 Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

If you find yourself tempted to slip into despair over your circumstances, remember God was faithful to fulfill the promise of the humble king and He will complete the good work He began in you.

Heb 6:18 tells us we have confidence in the hope before us. Where is that hope found and how do we get there?

What are the promises of God that you find hope in today and find an anchor for your soul?

WRAP-UP

We begin Advent by affirming the Hope we have in Jesus. A hope that transcends our circumstances. Not only has Jesus come in fulfillment of prophesy to bear our sins and offer us eternal life, but He will return again to usher in His Kingdom.

Memory Verse

*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
- Psalm 42:11 NIV*

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- Allow yourself time to lament this week, but let that time drive you to lay hold of the hope you have in God and His promises to you.

INTRODUCTION

This week we entered the season of Advent. The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming”. The church, during Advent, looks back upon Christ’s coming in celebration while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation to the coming of Christ’s kingdom when he returns for his people. The first week of Advent is focused on hope. God’s people relentlessly held on to the hope of God’s promise even in the darkest of times. Our key passage was written in a time of lament over great tragedy. Yet even then a flame of hope drove back the darkness. If 2020 also seems like a time of tragedy, rest assured that we have a hope that won’t fail us, and His name is Jesus.

Key Passage

Isaiah 64:1-9 NLT - 1 Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence! 2 As fire causes wood to burn and water to boil, your coming would make the nations tremble. Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame! 3 When you came down long ago, you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations. And oh, how the mountains quaked! 4 For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him! 5 You welcome those who gladly do good, who follow godly ways. But you have been very angry with us, for we are not godly. We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved? 6 We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind. 7 Yet no one calls on your name or pleads with you for mercy. Therefore, you have turned away from us and turned us over to our sins. 8 And yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand. 9 Don't be so angry with us, LORD. Please don't remember our sins forever. Look at us, we pray, and see that we are all your people.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When Everything is Destroyed

Much the year 2020 has been focused on the destruction done to us. When the events of the pandemic first began to unfold there was a collective sense of stoic optimism, the idea that if we just buckle down for a while this will soon be over and things would return to normal. But over time the hope we held for a brief interruption to our lives turned into the realization that we had turned a page and our future would be different because of it. For some the losses were tremendous; loved ones passed away, careers and businesses ended, support systems gone. In our despair we can feel incredibly distant from God. And in those times, we lament. Just as the Israelites did in facing their return to a devastated homeland after their exile.

Isaiah chapter 64 begins essentially saying, "If only you would do something God!" We hear in his broken heart, Isaiah saying "Where are you God?" The events of 2020 may have left you feeling the same way. What were your expectations about God's intervention in March 2020, and if they are different now, how have they changed? Would you say you feel closer to or farther from God now?

As Isaiah's lament continues, he recalls how God had previously intervened and did "awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations." And he had anticipated that God would do the same once again.

What are some of the ways you have seen God move on your behalf in the past? How have you experienced God's provision in your life most recently?

When Isaiah remembered what God did, he also remembered who God is, and who the Israelites were as His people. The contrast is quickly evident between the powerful, holy righteous God, and those who are not godly.

How do verses 4 and 5 describe those who find favor with God? What is God's response to them?

2. Owning My Part

The lament of Isaiah quickly turned to a confession as he realized how far short they had fallen from doing good and following godly ways. Isaiah wasn't pointing fingers at what others had done, nor was he confessing personal sins. Instead, we see from verse 5 on, a communal

confession of the sins of God's people. They had turned away from God in idolatry and disobedience and were now reaping the consequences.

This portion of the passage reflects the conviction God's people felt when they looked upon their own sinfulness. What were some of the images they used to describe their sin that showed their acceptance of the gravity of what they had done? That realization had driven them back towards God. How do we tend to view our own sin? If we minimize our sins as "little mistakes" will we feel the same hunger for God's presence and blessing that Isaiah felt?

3. Hope: More than Wishful Thinking

Despite the despair they felt over their circumstance, the Israelites held tight to hope. This hope is seen in Isaiah 64:7 -8.

What are the things that caused God's people to have hope? What aspects of the character of God give you hope?

Around the same time of Isaiah's writing, the prophet Zechariah was also speaking to the exiles returning to Judah. And it was through Zechariah that God gave them a reason to hope; a sign of the coming Messiah and a promise to bless them. Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy when He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9, 12 NLT - 9 Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey-- riding on a donkey's colt. ... 12 Come back to the place of safety, all you prisoners who still have hope! I promise this very day that I will repay two blessings for each of your troubles.

What was the promise in Zechariah 9:12 for those who held on to hope?

Philippians 1:6 NLT - 6 And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.