

The Hope of Advent is the Advent of Hope

Text: Eph 2:1-10 ⁱ

Introduction

Well, it's Advent! Who knows what advent is? Does anyone know what the term actually means?

- i. The arrival of a notable person or thing:
"the advent of television"
- ii. The first season of the Church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays (of which today is the first).
- iii. In Christian theology refers to the coming and the second coming of Christ.

It describes our celebration of the countdown to the coming of Christ on that very first Christmas day.

But the fact that is a countdown not only to a past event, but to a future one is something incredibly significant, and one which should fill each of us and

birth in each of us an eternal hope that extends far beyond the grave! You see, the hope of Advent is the advent of hope!

Let me see if I can illustrate this by way of a story...

Now I've used this illustration before, so for the sake of those who haven't heard it, please bear with me if you have heard it (and were actually awake at the time). But it communicates a pivotal truth when it comes to hope: Rodney Buchanan relates a story, how...

“Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son, shared a passion for art collecting. Together they travelled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others adorned the walls of the family estate.

The widowed father looked on with satisfaction as his only child became an experienced art collector. But the day came when war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his

country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram that his beloved son had been killed while carrying a fellow soldier to a medic.

On Christmas morning a knock came at the door of the old man's home, and as he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the man by saying, "I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments?

I have something to show you." "I'm an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of his son. Though the art critics would never consider the work a piece of genius, the painting did feature the young man's face in striking detail, and seemed to capture his personality.

The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation!

According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned. The day soon arrived, and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid. The room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. Minutes passed with not a sound from those who came to buy. From the back of the room someone callously called out, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and go on to the important paintings." There were other voices which echoed in agreement. But the auctioneer replied, "No, we have to sell this one first. Now, who will take the son?" Finally, a friend of the old man spoke. "I knew the boy, so

I'd like to have it. I will bid the \$100." "I have a bid for \$100," called the auctioneer. "Will anyone go higher?" After a long silence, the auctioneer said, "Going once. Going twice. Gone." The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room and someone was heard to say, "Now we can get on with it!"

But the auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over. Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of these paintings? There are millions of dollars' worth of art here! We demand that you explain what's going on!" The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son... gets it all." ii

The Source of Hope

You see, the truth of advent is just that – that hope, true hope, eternal hope was birthed in Christ that very

first Christmas day, consummated on the cross and sealed at His resurrection! And whoever gets the Son, gets it all!

And this hope – God’s eternal hope – does not disappoint us. Nothing of what that life can throw at us can diminish or dilute the eternal hope that Christ brought at His first advent and will consummate at the culmination of His second Advent, because it is a hope that reaches far beyond space and time as we know it. It is a hope without boundaries. A hope without borders. It is a hope that is not dependent on us nor anything this world has to offer. Indeed, it is hope that is established and rooted in the very glory of the fullness of God! It is both an eternal hope and an external hope! And Christ is the source!

Ro 5:1-5 - Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

And when we truly see it for what it is, it gives us hope beyond the storm, hope beyond the trial, hope beyond every injustice, hope beyond each tear, hope beyond all suffering, hope beyond every sickness, hope beyond the silence, hope beyond the grave... It is a hope that is able to carry us through anything this life and this world can throw at us precisely because it is not dependant on the circumstances of this life or this world. It does not find its source in anything this world offers. It is not a natural hope. It is a SUPERNATURAL hope! And its author, its source, is Christ Himself! Whoever takes the Son gets it all! In fact this hope is not diminished by life's trials and storms, but rather strengthened all the more through them.

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So on this first Sunday of Advent, Let us remember and celebrate the hope that God alone can establish and that Christ alone can provide to every human heart open to receive it.

The hope of Advent is the advent of hope!

And Christ is its source. Whoever gets the Son gets it all! But have you ever considered...

The Significance of Hope

It is believed that hope has the ability to help people heal faster and easier. Individuals who maintain hope, especially when battling illness, significantly enhance their chances of recovery.ⁱⁱⁱ

Emily Dickinson captures the power of hope so poetically when she writes:

“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.” — Emily Dickinson^{iv}

And Noemi Hedrick captures it equally as poetically when she writes:

“Faith and hope are closely linked, but different. Hope is a precursor to faith. While faith is believing and trusting in something that you cannot see, hope is imagining that there is something there to even believe and trust in. It is the belief in what could be. Hope redefines what is probable and opens the paths to the impossible. For example, faith is putting your trust in God to help in a financial difficulty, but hope opens the door to even let yourself consider that there may be a way out of your problem. Without hope, there can be no faith, because we would not even deign to pray about those things we could not imagine.”^v

The Need for Hope: Why hope matters

Hope matters. It really matters.

That is why God connects hope to a future... He says to Israel at the beginning of her exile...

I'm here with you. I'm in the thick of this with you. You may be here because of your own disobedience, but I will be here with you. And I have come to prosper

you, not only there and then, but here and now, even in the midst of your exile. I have come to give you a hope AND a future!

The hope of Advent is the advent of hope!

You see, you can lose everything but still have hope, and you'll be okay. But you can have everything and lose hope, and you will soon realise that you are left with nothing.

Kovie Biakolo captures the need for hope really well when she writes:

“Hope is not optimism. The two are closely related but are still distinguishable from each other. I think optimism is seeing the proverbial glass as half-full. I think hope is being able to see the good or expect goodness even when the glass is indeed half-empty or in situations where there is no glass at all. Both are important – optimism and hope – but I think hope is the more important of the two... simply existing on this earth is challenging – there is no life without struggle. I think hope gives us the

energy to live despite challenges, to love despite uncertainty, and to embrace both who we are in the moment and what we may become, without fear of what we do not know.

Hope, like faith is often the hardest thing to hold onto especially when you need it the most. But the only other option in those moments is despair. And while despair is humbling and quite natural, hope goes beyond natural; hope is supernatural especially in moments of darkness. And I guess this supernatural way of living may be ludicrous to some; it may be even ludicrous to one's own self. But in hope, the ridiculous is allowed. Because if you don't hope when all the chips are down, when everything around you is disastrous and despairing, do you really hope at all?"^{vi}

Proverbs 13:12 captures it so well – and indeed, thinking of Christ as our Tree of Life (and therefore our source of eternal, supernatural hope), it makes it all the more poignant!

Proverbs 13:12 - Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

The a hope of Advent if the advent of hope!

God is our source of hope. When we have hope, we realise its significance. Which brings us to the third point:

The Substance of Hope

When we realise that true hope, eternal hope, unconquerable hope is not an internal attribute (not something that finds its source and origin in us), and not an external, earthly attribute; in other words, we cannot find this one true hope, this eternal hope in the world or anything it has to offer), it brings us to the stark realisation that hope is not a ***something***... it is actually a ***someone***!

You see, the truth is that JESUS is not only our source of hope but its very substance! And we discover and experience this hope, not when we learn *about* Him so much as when we realise we are grafted *into* Him!

Our opening text makes that abundantly clear.

Ephesians 2:1 - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked,

Before the hope of advent and the advent of hope, we were dead to this eternal, supernatural hope because we were dead to God. BUT GOD... says Paul...

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive **together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ **and raised us up with him** and seated us with him in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus...**

Friends, our source of hope is God... and our substance of hope is God. We cannot experience this hope apart from Him and we cannot experience this hope aside from Him!

We know this hope when we are washed by the blood of the Lamb and we continue in this hope when we are grafted into Jesus Christ! There is no other source and there is no other substance.

Hope is not a feeling, it is not a frame of mind, it is not an emotion, it is not a commodity - it is the very Person of Jesus Christ in whom we are sealed, and raised and in whom we are seated in heavenly places!

The hope of Advent is the advent of hope!

And it is a hope that speaks not just of a past Christmas, but a future promise. It is a countdown not merely to a celebration of what was, but a promise of what is yet to come!

Eph 2:7 - so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The Source of all true hope is Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Jesus IS the quintessential message of hope.

The hope of Advent is the advent of hope. A countdown to the fullness of what God has already won and established for us in Christ Jesus!

But why is Jesus our quintessential hope?

Because one day every man, woman and child will stand before the throne of God and give an account of their lives.

Romans 14: 10-12 - Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

And even the very best of our lives can never reach the measure of perfection.

2 Corinthians 5:9,10 - So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Can anyone remember the high jumper illustration used at beginning of year?

You see, sinless perfection – which is the ultimate measure to a just, Holy, sinless, righteous God (and must be so for Him to be just and holy and sinless) is simply outside of our reach and ability. We cannot measure up. It is humanly impossible.

So what does God do?

He comes in our place. He steps into human skin. He is born in a manger. He dies on a cross. He is laid to rest in a borrowed grave.

And on the third day, He rises again, and with Him, HOPE dawns eternal!

And the significance of that? Here is the beautiful thing, friends... Here is the true power and miracle of hope... Let's go back to our opening text again...

Eph 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him **and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus**

**Here is the true significance of this heavenly hope
- this eternal hope, this God-birther, God-
sourced, God-sustained hope...**

**When we are called upon to stand before the
judgement seat of God one day, Jesus will stand
up on our behalf and say...**

**TAKE A SEAT! YOU ARE SEATED IN HEAVENLY
PLACES IN ME. I WILL SPEAK FOR YOU!**

And He will stretch out His nail-scarred hands, and
speak boldly to the Father and say, "Father, they fell
short of the mark! They do not have the right to stand
guiltless and sinless in your sight by their own effort.
BUT I CAN! AND I STAND HERE TODAY AND
SPEAK FOR THEM!"

The hope of Advent is the advent of hope!

**FRIENDS, OUR HOPE MEANS WE DON'T HAVE
TO STAND IN HEAVENLY PLACES, BUT ARE
SEATED IN CHRIST JESUS!**

If that doesn't fill you with hope, I'm not quite sure
what will!

Conclusion

So getting back to that opening illustration about the portrait of the son and the gavel coming down on auction day... the same rings true for us. We have a hope and a future in Christ...

Because whoever has The Son has everything! The hope of Advent is the advent of Hope! **End with My Hope Video (Song by Paul Baloche)**

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ Rodney Buchanan: Coming Alive in Christ

ⁱⁱⁱ Amanda Enayati: "How hope can help you heal". *CNN*. Retrieved 20 April 2015.

^{iv} Dickinson's Poetry: "'Hope' is the thing with feathers—...".

^v <http://noemiphotography.com/blog/hope-important/>

^{vi} Kovie Biakolo: Former Senior Writer & Cultural Advocate at Thought Catalogue