



A Season of Hope
ADVENT

A Real Hope for a Savior

Read

Jeremiah 33:13-16

In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the Lord. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall...

WEEK ONE | NOVEMBER 29

"Oh, I wish I could . . ."

We all wish for things. When we're young, we desire some awfully big things. We may wish for a bazillion dollars or for incredible strength. Or perhaps we wish that Grandma were still alive or that we hadn't said something hurtful to a friend.

Hope is greater than a wish. It's an anticipation of something that really can happen. When someone spends a lot of time preparing for a big presentation, they hope that the production will go well. If they haven't prepared, though, they can only wish for a good presentation.

The prophet Jeremiah lived hundreds of years before Jesus came. He spoke out against the corruption and evil of his time, telling God's people that God would not let their sins go unpunished. And he longed for the Messiah to come. This was no mere wish. Jeremiah believed that the Savior would come because he was counting on a promise. He confidently hoped for the Savior's arrival because the Lord had proclaimed it.

Jeremiah delighted in God's promises. His hope was anchored in God's words: "Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16).

Reflect

What promises from God give you hope?
In what ways can you live with hope in those promises?

Pray

Ask God to grant you and/or your family confidence in His promises and to remind you that He is faithful and will never abandon you.



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Hope in the Outsider



Read

Ruth 1:16-17

But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

WEEK TWO | DECEMBER 6

Have you ever wanted to completely quit on something?

It might have been tempting for Ruth, a Moabite, to move away from her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi. After tragedy struck and Ruth lost her husband, she had an opportunity to start over, to return to her hometown and try to rebuild her life. Naomi even said it might be best if Ruth really did leave because she was in a tough place herself. Naomi’s own husband had recently died, and she had no way to provide for her daughter-in-law. Wouldn’t most people prefer a familiar life over a new country and culture?

But Ruth was committed to her mother-in-law and her well-being, so she decided to remain loyal to Naomi and embrace Naomi’s people and God. They returned together to Bethlehem, the eventual birthplace of Jesus.

Because of her faithfulness and hard work, Ruth met and married a kind Israelite named Boaz. And so, Ruth was welcomed into the nation of Israel. But her loyalty was rewarded in an even greater way—she is part of Jesus’ ancestry! Ruth’s story again demonstrates God’s interest in pursuing and redeeming outsiders. God used her life to bring about the eventual birth of Jesus—the ultimate Pursuer and Redeemer.

Reflect

Sometimes you have to give up the easy, expected behaviors in order to do the right thing. What good decisions have been difficult for you to make?

Pray

Ask that God would give you and/or your family strength when right decisions are more difficult than the wrong ones.



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Hope Found in a Small Place



Read

Micah 7:7-8

But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

WEEK THREE | DECEMBER 13

“There’s not much here.”

Ever said that about a town, perhaps one you’re driving through on a road trip (or driving around the country roads here in IL) while looking for a good place to eat lunch or a park to stretch your legs? You cruise the main street, unimpressed.

“Can’t we go somewhere else?” you ask.

Then you see a sign proclaiming that this town is the birthplace of a famous leader or writer. See that little white house with the green trim? It was once her home. You think, OK, maybe this place is worth a closer look.

Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, the prophet Micah spoke out against the leadership of Israel, warning them that their corruption and rebellion against God’s ways would not go unpunished. But Micah also spoke of hopeful things to come, the arrival of the Savior in the town of Bethlehem.

“A small town without much there,” he pointed out. But from that town came the greatest individual in all of history. Bethlehem—once the city of David—became known as the place of the Savior’s birth.

A similar thing is true for believers today. When we agree to let Jesus live within us, to be Lord of our lives, we are changed. Our identity is defined by Him.

Reflect

What about you and/or your family’s life is different because the Lord Jesus resides in you?

Pray

Ask God to remind you of your identity in Christ when you begin to feel unimportant.



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Hope in the Midst of Sin

Read

Romans 7:7-12

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.



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WEEK FOUR | DECEMBER 20

Have you ever done the exact thing someone told you not to do?

When we read the account in Genesis 3 of humanity's first sin, we see Adam and Eve's swift and sorrowful expulsion from the Garden of Eden, an immediate separation from God's presence. Eden was the place where people's relationship with God flourished. It was where the Creator and His creation walked together in the cool of the evening (Genesis 3:8). No more could this be. God was pure, and humans were impure. They simply couldn't be together.

Yet God still cared. And loved. He used animal skins to clothe Adam and Eve, covering their nakedness and their shame. The death of the animals to provide their skins were the world's first sacrifice to cover a sin, a glimpse at the final sacrifice Jesus paid to cover the price for the sins of the whole world. And it all started when He put on human skin to clothe himself and came to earth.

Without such a sacrifice to atone for sin, we might live eternally separated from God. But God is love (1 John 4:8); Christ's sacrifice bridges the gap.

With His birth, death and resurrection, He provided the way for us to come back into a relationship with Him. Have you come to Him in faith to be clothed in His righteousness (Is. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21)?

Reflect

What is it about having rules—even if it's just one rule—that makes us want to break them?

Pray

Thank God for the gift of Jesus, who paid the price for our sin. Ask Him for wisdom and guidance to make good decisions when faced with temptation.



The Hope of Eyewitnesses



Read

Luke 2:15-17

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

CHRISTMAS EVE | DECEMBER 24

Have you ever visited a new place or saw a new movie that you just had to tell a friend about? And the friend's response was probably typical: "I'll have to check it out." Yes, they believed you. It's just that . . . well, they still need to see it for themselves.

When the angelic choir disappeared into the darkness, leaving the shepherds alone on that hillside outside Bethlehem, the shepherds probably had questions. They didn't doubt the news—the sights and sounds of the heavenly hosts convinced them of the truth. But curiosity moved their hearts, so they decided to visit the new King.

"Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened," they said to one another.

So, they left the sheep and went into town, where they found a dirty stable and a newborn baby sleeping in a manger. They knelt in the dirt. Here He was! The long-promised Savior.

Afterward, the shepherds could hardly contain their excitement. They told everyone they met about what the angel had said. Most people were surprised, though some were likely skeptical—people who needed to see for themselves or didn't believe a baby could be their Savior.

But many believed. They understood, through hearing the words of the world's first evangelists, that the Messiah had arrived!

Reflect

You have a choice to make when you hear the news about the Savior. How have you responded?

Pray

Thank God for the ways He reveals himself to you and/or your family, even though you've never seen Him with your eyes.



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The Hope of Jesus

Read

Philippians 2:5-11

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



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CHRISTMAS DAY | DECEMBER 25

When you pray, how do you picture the God who listens?

What does God look like? It's a question as old as time. Throughout Scripture, God is represented in many ways. A father and a fire. A whirlwind and a whisper. Like a mighty warrior, He attacks evil. Like a mother hen, He shelters His chicks under His wings. He is feared, adored, and worshiped.

On a night long ago, Mary may have studied the face of her newborn boy. She was exhausted, likely still in pain from childbirth. She was perhaps the first to glimpse a profound truth: God had emptied himself of His divine qualities, choosing to take on weak, flawed human flesh and to dwell among us.

What a journey! He would endure heat, hunger and thirst. He would experience the range of emotions, encounters and experiences that define the human condition.

Why did God choose this way to redeem us? He wants us to know that He understands how we feel. He has experienced what we experience, yet He serves us with the full heart and character of the Creator. He would say it to His followers:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

What does God look like? Look to Jesus, and you will know.

Reflect

What does it mean to your faith that the Creator of the universe knows what it's like to be you?

Pray

Thank God that He is a God who can relate to your experiences. Ask Him to draw you closer to Him when you feel as though no one understands you.