

Christmas Bible Study #1 - Hope

(for sermon on 3-Dec-2023)

Before we begin, how would you define “Hope”? Is Hope in the Bible different to the way you define hope?

Hope (noun) definition: a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen.

Hope (verb) definition: want something to happen or be the case.

The Hebrew word for “hope” is “Tikvah” used in places like Jeremiah 29:11. Israel’s national anthem is Hatikvah (The Hope). In the Hebrew context, both biblically and in the modern Hebrew, hope is more than just a dream. It is an expectation, and a strong expression of faith. The Bible teaches that hope is like a rock you can rely on. You can hold fast to it and it strengthens you. The word literally means a cord or rope and it comes from a root word that means to bind or to wait for or wait upon.

The Greek word for “hope” is “elpis” and in a Christian context it means the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.

So, in modern day language, when we say I hope for better days ahead – hope here carries some doubt; it’s not certain; whereas in Biblical language, when it comes to our hope of salvation; it is a certain hope, because of Jesus.



Read Isaiah 9:1-7

1. What is promised in verses 1 and 2? And for whom?

The prophet Isaiah (continuing his warning from Isaiah chapter 8) warns the people of Judah about the pending invasion of Assyria. The invasion would be particularly bad for the northern regions of the Promised Land, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, which are in the Sea of Galilee region. But here, Isaiah promises a future time when these current gloomy days for the region of Galilee will become days where the region of

Galilee is honoured; and the people of the region, that were once walking in darkness, will now see a great light!

2. Is this fulfilled? (cf. Matthew 4:12-17)

The Gospel of Matthew quotes this promise of Isaiah's and says it is fulfilled when Jesus, in His ministry, comes to the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. The point is that Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12) shines light in this region.

3. What is promised in verses 3 to 5?

Verses 3 to 5 go on to explain WHO is going to come and what He is going to do.

The WHO is God's promised Messiah.

Messiah in Hebrew (Masiah/Mashiyach) means God's anointed and chosen one (the term first used by Hannah in her song in 1 Samuel 2:10)

The Greek equivalent of the word Messiah is The Christ. Messiah and Christ mean the same thing!

The ministry of the Messiah would "enlarge the nation and bring joy" (v3) to Israel. Jesus said His ministry was like having a wedding party (Matthew 9:14-15). They will rejoice according to the joy of harvest (v3), the time when the hard work has paid off and the harvest is reaped. They will rejoice as soldiers rejoice when they divide the spoils of war, with a celebration of victory.

V4 – Just like in the time of Gideon (Judges 7) when Gideon had a great victory over the Midianites. Just as Gideon's victory was wonderfully complete and joyous, so too will be the victory the Messiah will enjoy and give!

V4b – The Messiah will shatter the yoke on people's shoulders and shatter the rod of oppression on the people. This again speaks of a complete victory. Jesus, the Messiah, has complete victory over all our spiritual enemies! When is Jesus sad or worried or afraid? When does Jesus groan under the yoke of his burden? When does Jesus feel the sting of the rod of his oppressor? When is Jesus' victory incomplete? The risen, glorified, ascended Jesus experiences none of these things, and He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). As we are in Jesus Christ, we share in His victory: We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

And the idea in v5 of the warrior's boot and bloodstained clothes being rolled up and used for fuel in the fire is also the idea of a victory complete and the battle over. The Messiah's victory will be complete!

4. Who is promised in verse 6?

A child is born – to us a son is given. He is no ordinary child and no ordinary son. He is a child from God; He is the Son of God. The child is both God and Man.

5. Write some notes on each description given for this promised child.

The government will be on his shoulders: *In the original Hebrew language this means that the rule and dominion of the whole world is on Jesus' shoulders*

Wonderful Counselor: *The Hebrew here literally means – a wonder of a counsellor – it's the nearest word in Hebrew to 'supernatural' – so it means Jesus is a supernatural counsellor. His wisdom is not like human wisdom – His wisdom is way higher than human wisdom.*

Mighty God - *Mighty can also mean strong and brave here – like any ruler should be – but no ruler or king that ever lived can really claim to be God (they might think they can) – but here Jesus is described as God –*

This should put paid to any claims by people that Jesus was just a good bloke with great teaching – Here Isaiah states clearly Jesus is fully God – and His might and strength does not come as human's would expect by military power – but through the power of His Word

Everlasting Father: *This gives us the encouragement to know that Jesus' rule of this Earth is not temporary – but permanent – everlasting - forever and ever – he's not going to be dethroned or succeeded - And the term Father – speaks of his care and concern for His people. He cares for His people like any good father would care for his children*

Prince of Peace: *Prince makes him royalty – and Peace is the Hebrew word – Shalom – which gives the idea of completeness, wholeness, healthiness, wellbeing and contentment – It means much more than our English word peace. And ultimately, we can only have all of this by being in a right relationship with God. Jesus achieves that peace between human beings and God. That is why Isaiah is able to say in v2 – that the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. That's what Jesus – the light of the world does – he calls people out of the darkness of sin – into the light of His forgiveness of sin – by his death on the cross He brings inner peace to all who believe in Him –*

6. How is the government of the promised child described? How does that compare to today's governments?
King Jesus' government will govern in peace forever without any end – He will reign on His throne forever and ever. This should give us hope of better things to come when we can live with Jesus in His forever kingdom – where there won't be any more wars, no terrorism, no suffering, no terrorism, no problems, no covid, no cancer – just everlasting peace with the Prince of Peace

7. What promise is there in verse 7? How is this promise accomplished?
Jesus as a descendant of David reigns on David's throne forever. This is fulfilment of the promise that God made to King David in 2 Samuel 7. This promise is accomplished because of the Lord Almighty's zeal – literally because of His jealousy for His people – His need to have a proper relationship with His people – drives Him – to send Jesus to fix sin in the world – and bring peace between God and humankind

8. Do you find hope in this passage from Isaiah 9? If so, in what way and how certain is it?
*There is hope in the fact that Jesus, the Messiah's, coming to this Earth, brought transformation because His glorious light shines on those walking in the darkness of sin!
 There is hope in the fact that Jesus brings peace (shalom) between God and humankind. A peace that surpasses all understanding.
 There is hope in the fact that His Kingdom is a forever Kingdom, without end and beyond this Earth, in Heaven.
 There is hope in the truth that His coming brings victory over all God's enemies.*

Because God ALWAYS keeps His promises; this hope IS a certain hope.

9. How could Isaiah 9:1-7 apply to our lives today?
- Finding hope in darkness – this passage encourages us to trust in God's promises even in the darkest moments. There is always the potential for divine intervention and transformation*
 - As the Prince of Peace – Jesus brings peace between humans and God. Jesus also promotes peace in our relationships which works towards a more peaceful and just country/world*
 - We have a Wonderful Counsellor we can come to seek wisdom and guidance*

- d. *The promise of establishing the government with justice and righteousness encourages us to actively engage in promoting these values in their communities. This may involve advocating for social justice, caring for the marginalized, and working towards a more just and righteous society.*
- e. *Because Jesus' Kingdom is forever – we can be certain of our eternal destination, no matter what is going on in our lives and no matter what is going on here on Earth!*

Read Matthew 1:18-24

10. Why is Matthew 1:1-17 important when reading Matthew 1:18-24?

Matthew 1:1-17 gives us Jesus' family line; which shows Jesus is from the family of King David. This shows Jesus is the fulfilment of God's Promise to King David of a forever King (2 Samuel 7) and also shows Jesus is a fulfilment of God's Promise in Isaiah 9:7 that the Messiah will reign on David's throne. All this confirms Jesus is the Promised Messiah!

So, verses 1 to 17 giving Jesus family line, leads us nicely into His birth in verses 18 to 24.

11. How does Mary become pregnant in verse 18? Why is this important? (cf. Luke 1:35)

Mary even though she was only pledged to be married to Joseph and had not slept with him, became pregnant through the Holy Spirit. This means it is a miraculous pregnancy.

The Angel Gabriel had promised Mary that the Holy Spirit would come on her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her and she would give birth to the Son of God.

The virgin birth is important because it means Jesus does not come from a human seed but from God; therefore, Jesus is born WITHOUT sin. It is vital that Jesus is born WITHOUT sin, otherwise He cannot be the perfect one and for all sacrifice for sin. In comparison to the Old Testament priests who made the sacrifices for sin who were themselves sinful and so the sacrifices were repeated over and over.

"There was no other way of his being born; for had he been of a sinful father, how should he have possessed a sinless nature? He is born of a woman, that he might be human; but not by man, that he might not be sinful." (Spurgeon)

12. What does Joseph plan to do in verse 19? Why?

There were essentially three steps to marriage in the Jewish world of Jesus' time.

Engagement: *This could happen when the bride and groom to be were quite young, and was often arranged by the parents.*

Betrothal (Pledged): *This made the previous engagement official and binding. During the time of betrothal, the couple were known as husband and wife, and a betrothal could only be broken by divorce. Betrothal typically lasted a year.*

Marriage: *This took place after the wedding, after the year of betrothal.*

Joseph is referred to in v19 as Mary's husband. The previous verse told us that Mary was pledged (betrothed) to Joseph. This comment shows that even though they were not formally married, Joseph was still considered Mary's husband by betrothal.

Being a just man, Joseph knew that if Mary had been unfaithful to him, it would be impossible to go through with the marriage. Yet his nature as a just man also did not want to make this an unnecessary hardship or stigma upon Mary. Joseph made the understandable decision to seek a quiet divorce.

"When we have to do a severe thing, let us choose the tenderest manner. Maybe we shall not have to do it at all." (Spurgeon)

13. What changes Joseph's mind in verse 20?

An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that Mary's baby conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Note: significantly the angel refers to Joseph as the "Son of David"

14. Why is Jesus' name important in verse 21? What will Jesus grow up to do?

Jesus' name means "YHWH saves or Saviour". Jesus will grow up to save His people from their sins. Here we have Jesus' mission statement. He is born to die on a cruel cross as the ultimate once and for all sacrifice for sins.

15. What prophecy is said to be fulfilled in verses 22 and 23?

The prophecy from Isaiah 7:14 that a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel.

16. What do we learn from Joseph's actions in verse 24 and 25? What does Immanuel mean?

We learn obedience from Joseph's actions. He listened to the message from God delivered by the angel and did exactly what God commanded and took Mary as his wife. Immanuel means "God is with us" which shows that Jesus is in fact God as well as man.

17. How could Matthew 1:18-25 apply to our lives today?

- a. We can learn the importance of faith and obedience in following God's commands and guidance in His Word.*
- b. It teaches us the role of the supernatural work of God in human affairs*
- c. We learn the mission of Jesus – to save people from their sins – and that we are part of this mission in telling others about His mission (Matthew 28:16-20)*
- d. God always keeps His promises and His prophecies are always fulfilled. It also shows the continuity from the Old to the New Testament*
- e. The name Immanuel shows God's presence with us. Jesus promises as He ascends to Heaven that He will be with us to the end of the age.*
- f. Joseph's initial decision to divorce Mary quietly rather than expose her to public shame reflects his compassion and righteousness. This serves as an example of dealing with difficult situations with love and mercy.*

18. What questions do you have about these two passages?

19. What light globe moments have you discovered in these two passages?

20. Having looked at these two passages, has your definition of hope changed from the beginning of the study?

It's clear that the hope given in these two passages is not a "maybe it will happen" hope but a "certain" hope!

Finish in prayer: Thanking God for the hope we have in our Lord Jesus?