

## Christmas & Advent...

It is safe to conclude, Christmas has become something in our culture that is very different than originally intended. That is not rhetoric nor bashing. It is just reality.

In early origin, Christmas was birthed from a pagan holiday involving the Winter Solstice. It actually didn't begin as a Christian holiday. This early northern European pagan celebration was built around the shortest day of the year, where the lack of sun was most evident.

The further north you would travel, the shorter these days were. As historical legend goes, this celebration would joyfully commence with the reemergence of the sun, signaling the continuation of life.

Early Christians, traveling to these parts, found a beautiful symmetry in this to the story of salvation: In our darkness, we were doomed to lifelessness, until, Jesus, the Son emerged to bringing true life to us.

I personally love that the Kingdom finds ways to swallow up and incorporate symbolisms, whether pagan mythology, or not, and inject the beauty of Christ into the story. I think it is a strength of ours.

## What is ADVENT?

The word originally was used to draw the early church's attention to the promised return of Jesus. It became used to identify a time when we focus on the original gift of God with Man.

So in this, we have the origins of this time in the Church calendar.

## My goal...

I want to return to the roots of this time: Focusing on the gift of God in Jesus. There are four words we will consider in the next few weeks:

HOPE  
PEACE  
JOY  
LOVE

## The story...

Many of us are familiar with the nativity. There is so much beauty in this picture. Yet, as we have moved through time, we have begun to embrace many inaccuracies as truth. I believe we gain a much different, and more impactful understanding of this event if we consider the history surrounding it.

He is born at the end of a time that is referred to as the 400 years of silence. This is a time when the voice of God would go silent to the Nation of Israel.

The 400 years of silence began with a warning that is found in: (Malachi 4:5-6)

*"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse"*

Consider that time.

There were 20 generations that would happen without the voice of God communicating.

The history of our United States of America could be held within that time.

In this time, religion would become the normal reality. There was no voice, no life, only memories and stories from the elderly.

Consider being that Jewish person, who believed Yahweh, and yet you watched your faith, which you were told was alive, be overthrown by kingdom after kingdom?

Pompeii in 63 AD. His act of defiance would have shook the faith of people.

If we study Jacob and Esau, we learn of a man, Jacob, who would capture the favor of God and become the lineage that God choose to bless. If you were an Israelite, you would proudly declare you were the child of, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Yet, in this time of silence, you would watch the descendants of Esau, Herod the Great, be placed as your governor to oppress you. It was very clear, God had pulled back from His children.

This is the socio-political climate the Messiah is born into.

Would it be safe to say many were assuming there was no PEACE with God?  
Would it be safe to say there was an absence of JOY in their relationship with Him?  
Would it be a stretch to conclude that perhaps, God's people felt His LOVE had been removed?  
Would it be safe to conclude that many of the people of God had lost HOPE?

In Matthew 2v11, it is said the Magi, sorcerers and spiritualists from the far east, came to the house of Mary and Joseph.

Can you imagine being a Jewish person, who had been the carriers of His Voice, watching clear evidence that God was still speaking...but realizing it was not to you.

This is the moment the Christ-child is born into. He is born to bring HOPE to a Hopeless people.

#### ADVENT WEEK 1 - HOPE

I want to invite our focus this week on the beautiful reality that God sent Jesus to restore Hope. He is Hope. If Jesus was sent to restore Hope in the people of God, then one of his continuing roles is to restore Hope in our lives, today.

He is our HOPE.

I want to look at what the Scriptures teach about that HOPE:

What would we say hope is, if we really boil it down?

*The confident belief that He is in control and I can trust that.*

If Hope is the confident belief that He is in control, than it's opposite value is the fear that He is not.

Perhaps, Fear and Hope are the opposite reactions to the same set of variables.

Fear lives on the, "what if, what might" continuum

Hope lives on the, "perhaps God, But with God" continuum

Hope teaches me to trust God in the process. What He says, what His word says, will be truth in my life.

Fear invites me to assess the circumstance and conclude a potential outcome.

I would submit that one is natural and one is divine. We are born with fear of what we cannot control. We are not born with Hope. Hope is grown into us.

***I would submit the difference lies in our perspective and our choices.***

Romans 5v2-11

*Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward (HOPE) to sharing God's glory.*

***We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us —they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character***

*strengthens our confident expectation of salvation (HOPE). And this expectation (HOPE) will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*

Notice these verses.

Paul is revealing the process for developing Hope in our lives.

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*Who is we?*

Believers

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*Can rejoice*

It is an option to choose joy.

(root word for rejoice means to exult- Exult means to show and feel elation or jubilation)

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*Run into*

In the process of life, find yourself in a struggle.

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*For we know they are good for us*

To have experiential knowledge of something, whereas to understand or see the beneficial results

We know they are good for us...because they produce something in us.

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*The help us LEARN to endure*

When we face them with joy, we learn to Endure

Endurance is *Patient steadfastness*. In other words, we don't waiver. There is strength in us.

As we know, just facing difficulty does not do this.

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*Endurance develops strength of character*

When we face them with joy, it develops strength of character

The root word is to *test or prove* something. I would say it this way, we can't know our character until it is tested.

***Choosing to rejoice, or choosing joy actually shapes poor character into Kingdom character.***

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*Character brings greater HOPE.*

When we face them with joy our strengthened character teach us to expect goodness.

We learn His character through these trials, and as we choose joy, we reshape our expectations. We move away from negativity into positive hope. We move out of fear into trust.

We didn't talk about trials & tribulations. These are the key. How we face them is everything.

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*Trials & Tribulations*

The root word for these means to press together.

We would call it pressure.

Think of a pressure cooker.

These trials and tribulations are situations that we feel extreme pressure in our environment.

It can be marriage.

It can be work.

It can be home life.

It can be school.

It can be anything.

According to Paul, HOW we handle these matters. Hope is on the line, and Paul is revealing a process that Jesus, the great gift of Hope, is utilizing in our lives.

Paul just revealed that Hope is built when we learn to rejoice during our high pressure situations.

Could I submit that Jesus is using every situation we find ourselves in and planning for a greater impartation of HOPE through that trial?

Here is the problem...

The reciprocal value is true as well. If I can partner with this to build my hope, then I can also rebel from this process and erode my hope.

Some of us are hopeless because we don't understand how to CHOOSE to rejoice in the middle of the high pressure stuff. When we don't, we lose hope and we lose vision.

***Your response to your trials and tribulations matters.***

The agenda of heaven is to see you GROW in HOPE in these situations.

I would say that growth in HOPE is akin to a greater impartation of JESUS in us.

That is what is on the line IN our struggles. Our struggles are the very opportunity for more of Jesus to invade our lives.

The battle is in the mind.

James 1v2

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds*

Consider means to, "account as, or reckon."

It means I have to make the decision to choose joy IN my struggles.

Because I trust Him to do His process.