

Hope: An Advent/Christmas Journey 11-29-20 Next Steps

Welcome

- Icebreaker - What Winter activity do you most look forward to?

Introduction

Gender reveal celebrations have become a major highlight during the preparation time for expectant mothers, fathers, their loved ones. Creativity and innovation have become evident in the planning and execution of this monumental moment. Excitement builds as we await the good news.

Discussion

A major prophecy by Isaiah revealed that something exciting was on the horizon. The people of Israel were in exile and needed a word of hope. Isaiah would make a prophetic announcement that would alter their lives and provide something for them to look forward to. However, following this announcement there would be a prolonged period of waiting.

1. How can we maintain hope during a prolonged season where a promise has been made, but has yet to be fulfilled?
2. How does the potential to emerge from dismal circumstances affect the mindset of those who have been experiencing difficulty?

Hope came to the world in the form of a newborn child named Jesus. He is the Savior of the world and the incarnation of God. He is the fulfillment of prophecy and God's promise. This Savior brought hope to the world that was worth waiting for. Jesus makes it possible for us to experience Heaven on earth as we welcome Him into our lives as Savior and King. Prophecy foretold,

*“He will be named Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”
(Isaiah 9:6)*

This was great news to the people of Israel, and remains great news to us today.

3. What did the prophecy of a mighty ruler mean to the people of Israel who were in need of a Messiah?
4. What does the fulfillment of this prophesy mean for us today?

Jesus was the promised Messiah who would lead Israel from oppression to overcoming. Israel had been looking hoping for a king whose very presence would change their immediate circumstances. During their season of waiting, they continued to trust,

*“those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.”
(Isaiah 40:31)*

Waiting is not easy. Prolonged waiting has the potential to deplete one's strength and cause them to grow weary. This is especially true when the waiting period extends from days to weeks, weeks to months, months to years, and years to decades and beyond. Very few people are good at waiting. Oftentimes when we want something, we want it right away. However, holding on to hope that one day the wait will be over and trusting that a promise or blessing will one day be received gives us the strength to endure until the promise has been fulfilled.

5. Why is waiting for a promise to be fulfilled difficult for many?
6. What should we do during a season of waiting and anticipation?
7. How should we respond when we begin to grow tired of waiting for our promise to be fulfilled?

Isaiah's prophetic words were shared with a people who had been experiencing exile. Their hopes and dreams had been eclipsed by their current situation. Isaiah's prophecy of hope was spoken in the midst of a hopeless situation. Israel's oppression would last hundreds of years until God's promise intersected with new hope that came with the birth of Jesus. God was physically present with humanity. Jesus would not only be good news for humanity, but would also bring Heaven on Earth. Heaven is rich in joy and overflowing with peace. Jesus would usher in new peace and joy on Earth. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary. He was born into the royal lineage of king David. Israel had been hoping and dreaming of a

ruler who would lead them into the future with justice and virtue. However, no one expected for that king to be born in a manger with animals. Jesus would have a humble and lowly birth but would become a tremendous blessing to the world. He would experience tests and trials but would remain sinless and become the perfect sacrifice to atone for all of the sins of humanity. Being both human and divine, Jesus would become the perfect Savior who was able to not only identify with the pain and suffering of sinful humanity but also reconcile it with a sinless God.

8. What can we expect when God's promise intersects with a situation that appears to be hopeless?

9. Why is it beneficial to have an advocate who is familiar with the tests and trials that we face?

Jesus brought hope and healing for our world. The one who was born for us also died for our sins and created an everlasting connection between Heaven and Earth. Because of Jesus we are able to feel Heaven all around us. We experience Heaven on Earth when we feel a tug that strengthens, comforts, and encourages us to hold on during difficult times. Our prayers create hope that is heard by God. Hope gives us the assurance of a better outcome in spite of the process we may have to endure. As we open our eyes and heart during this Advent season, we can see Heaven on Earth. We can be fully aware of the presence of Jesus and grace in our lives.

10. How have you experienced Heaven on Earth?

Prayer Journal Entry

- Each day write 1 way that you have experienced Heaven on Earth. How did it make you feel? Are you able to share this experience with others?

Soul-Check/Transformation Question (Everyone Answers)

- How easy is it for you to acknowledge God's presence during moments of difficulty as you are waiting for positive change to come?