

MESSAGE - Hoping in God's Future

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What do you hope for?

I realize that may be a question with a pretty obvious answer right now. Especially since our world is hoping and praying for a lot of things: for things to be back to normal, an end to the pandemic, the upcoming election, for warm, sunny days.

I recognize the word hope is used pretty broadly, kind of like the word love.

- I hope that shirt I ordered online fits right;
- I hope it doesn't rain so we can get our golf game in....
- I hope you arrive safely on your trip.....
- I hope we can have peace.

We throw the word around a lot, use it in many ways. So I appreciated the conversation the other night with one of our church's small groups...the conversation was about hope. We talked about the author's understanding that hope is not wishful thinking. It is not about uncertainty but it is about looking forward with certainty.

It's what we need in every time in life: to look forward with certainty and as people of faith, our certainty is in what God is doing, what God is planning, what God has promised, what God is bringing to pass.

Which brings us to today's passage from Isaiah in which God declares what his vision and designs and plans are:

Isaiah 25:1, 6-9

LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.

You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.

Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you.

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.

For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of

the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled. On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

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Isaiah paints this picture for the people of his day who are facing some pretty tough realities: a nation of people who have forgotten the Lord and a foreign nation breathing down their necks. Those ancient Israelites were a people who were in desperate need of hope. And in Isaiah's message to them, we learn a couple of things about hope:

#### Hope is informed by the past

Part of the faith practice of the ancient Hebrews was to recall what God had done; how they had seen God act in the past...this gave them confidence in what God would do in the present and future. We hear this practice:

In the psalms....Psalm 66:

Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind!

<sup>6</sup> He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—  
come, let us rejoice in him.

<sup>7</sup> He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—  
let not the rebellious rise up against him.

<sup>8</sup> Praise our God, all peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard;

<sup>9</sup> he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.

<sup>10</sup> For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

<sup>11</sup> You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs.

<sup>12</sup> You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water,  
but you brought us to a place of abundance.

Isaiah uses this tactic in this passage:

"you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago".

“You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.”

I try to remember this for my own faith practice

When hard times hit

When doubt comes

When my heart is hurting

I found that hoping in what God will bring is so much more tangible when I remember and call to mind how God has been faithful in the past.

Hope is particular/specific

We have fallen into the use of generalizations:

It'll get better

Everything will be okay

But God uses specifics:

In Isaiah:

Setting a feast of richest foods and wines

Wiping away tears

Destroying the shroud of death

Other places:

I will bring you from the north and “give them up....”

I will restore the fortunes of Zion

There will be a new heaven and a new earth.

And in Jesus:

I am the resurrection and I am life

I go to prepare a place for you and will come again to take you to myself.

And the specifics help....

So we know what to look for

And we know when it comes about.

And we know that what we are experiencing is God's doing.

This is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes.

So what do you hope for?

As God's children, we can dare to hope with certainty because God has already begun fulfilling all our hopes in Jesus Christ our Lord.