## Best Christmas Ever

### Week 1: Hope - Isaiah 9:2

**Big Idea:** We have eternal hope in Jesus, the light of God to all nations, and we can share hope - shine the light - so that others may have it too.

**Prayer:** “*God, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for hearing our cries for help and being attentive to our needs. Help me to see that the arrival of Jesus means the arrival of hope in my life. Help me choose to see the light in the midst of the darkness and may I be one who shares this hope with others.”*

**Main Scriptural Text:** Isaiah 9:2

**Supplemental Scriptural Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, Psalm 147:11, Romans 5:2-7, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 4:6, 2 Timothy 1:10

**Introduction**

**(Opener idea:** Begin the series with a beautifully wrapped gift in your hands or on stage. Ask everyone in the room to think about the thing that they want most this Christmas. What is the one desire they hope to be wrapped up in the box. Give some relevant examples of what could possibly be inside. Transition your illustration by making the case that no matter who it is, what people would like to receive more than anything is hope. Hope would be an incredible gift to receive since many people are struggling in the face of loss, disappointment, difficulty and anxiety. And for many people, the holidays intensify those feelings.)

Today we begin a 4 week series called, *The Best Christmas Ever.* I know it’s kind of a goofy pop culture way to say it, but what makes something *The Best Ever?* What characteristics or adjectives come with something that exceeds your expectations? How does an event move from ordinary to extraordinary?

(Pastor - Do you have a story to share about an extraordinary experience you’ve had? What made it so special?)

Obviously, this has been a difficult year and for some it has been the *worst year ever.*

Which is why I want nothing more than for this year to end on a high note. For as dark and difficult as things have been, there is a light at the end of this tunnel. During Christmas we celebrate the hope we have in Christ as we remember His humble beginnings and miraculous journey into the world.

*Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.* (Psalm 30:5)

Let’s begin an extraordinary journey of hope, peace, joy, and love together today. Let’s believe that this can be *The Best Christmas Ever.*

**Main Teaching**

**Our Hope is Christ**

Jesus’ arrival on earth was a great source of hope to all people. For centuries God’s people stumbled in darkness. They were tormented and defeated by the evil that was all around them. Many of us know what it feels like to be surrounded by darkness as we struggle through disappointment, mistakes, failure and sin. It is hard to have hope when all you can see is darkness.

We also know that the best way to eliminate darkness is to expose it to light. When Jesus became human and came to us as a baby, the ancient prophecies were fulfilled and the world found hope in the birth of it’s Savior.

He is the light of the world and the darkness can not overcome us.

Turn with me to the book of Isaiah, as we read verse 9:2 together;

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”*

Isaiah was a prophet of God. Some would say he was the greatest prophet-- and all would agree he was prophesying to a broken people, filled with despair, during one of the darkest times in Israel’s history.

What Isaiah offered, through the inspiration of the Spirit, was *hope.* Specifically, that there would be light in place of darkness and that the light would shine on those living in deep darkness.

And we now know Isaiah was prophesying about the coming of Christ into the world. We also know that Christ has already come once, and we patiently wait as we look for his second and final arrival.

As we journey together through the season of Advent on our way to Christmas we must first acknowledge and recognize the *hope* we share in Christ our saviour. He is the light of hope piercing through the deepest of darkness. Christ will return for His Church and in the meantime, we trust that He will do exactly what He said He would.

Our shared hope is in Christ alone.

**Hope Sees Light in the Midst of Darkness**

Let’s read Romans 15:12-13 together;

*“And again, Isaiah says,*

*‘The Root of Jesse will spring up,*

*one who will arise to rule over the nations;*

*in him the Gentiles will hope.’*

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Isaiah is being quoted in Romans 15 as the Apostle Paul is pointing to the “root of Jesse” as the source of our hope. This allusion is to Jesus Christ who is the source of our hope.

After quoting Isaiah, Paul gives us a mini benediction and exhortation. He prays that we would be filled with joy and peace that would overflow with hope! Think about this for a moment; Our joy and peace increase as we trust in Christ, which leads to an overflow of hope through the power of the Spirit.

Hope doesn’t increase because of favorable circumstances in your life, nor does it decrease because of unfavorable ones. Hope resides in the person of Christ. So, even in the midst of deep darkness, pain, and loss we can be overflowing with hope.

The difficulty though, is to maintain a trust and confidence in God’s plan for our lives. It’s natural to have doubts and it’s not abnormal to be scared - confused - or even frustrated.

Actually, It means you’re human – you’re exactly the kind of human God sent His one and only son to die for.

On your absolute worst day, Christ is for you. His light is shining on and through the darkness in your life.

**Let Christ Live in You and Shine Through You**

It’s important to remember in all of this that when you give up your life to follow Christ, something amazing happens. The material things you once thought you couldn’t live without seem to lose their shine. You truly become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), with new motives, new desires, and new goals.

The Apostle Paul says it this way in his letter to the Galatians,

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20)

And as you grow in faith, you begin to overflow with hope… remember Romans 15:13? And as hope comes pouring out of you in every situation and through any adversity where do you think it goes? What is the purpose of being filled to overflowing with hope?

(Pastor - do you have a story you can share here of divine hope? Maybe a situation in your life or something that has happened in your church? An illustrative story here will really help to transition to the next point, and the conclusion)

**Don’t Hide the Light**

Does anyone here know what the purpose of a lighthouse is?

*“It is a tower with a bright light at the top, located at an important or dangerous place regarding navigation (travel over water). The two main purposes of a lighthouse are to serve as a navigational aid and to warn boats of dangerous areas[[1]](#footnote-0).”*

Hope is a lot like the light in a lighthouse. Hope helps to guide us through uncharted, unknown, and dangerous territory. Hope not only helps us, but we share it with others - through the overflow in our lives. In fact, the Apostle Peter said, “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the* ***hope*** *that you have.*” (1 Peter 3:15)

And Jesus said,

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* - Matthew 5:14-16

You are a lighthouse to a broken and lost world. Don’t hide your light - LET IT SHINE!

Let the hope of Christ light you up so bright that others can’t even help themselves and ask you what’s going on.

Let the light that shines on you - help light the way for others.

**Conclusion**

**The Best Christmas Ever Will Be Rooted in Hope**

There is no greater gift we can give to those around us than the eternal hope of Christ. When we believe strongly that God will come through on his promises to us, then we are stirred to let our hope spill over into those around us. Choose hope this Christmas season and let it be contagious.

C.S. Lewis said;

*“Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.”*

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the state of our world, but don’t lose heart, **Jesus has overcome the world.**

Stop believing the lies that things will never change. Choose to find hope in the promises of God. Choose to believe that Jesus’ birth changes everything. Each day we can be defeated by darkness or find victory in the light of Christ.

Choose hope.

And share it with others.

This coming week, think about the people in your life who you spend the most time with; Family - friends - coworkers - your local barista… And consider ways you can share the hope you have with them.

And if you’re running low on hope, if you’re feeling like your light isn’t shining as bright as it used to… we’re going to pray for you this morning.

(Pastor - what are some other ways you can encourage your congregation this Christmas season?)

Let’s pray together.

1. Definition found here: https://www.nps.gov/apis/learn/kidsyouth/upload/lightcurra.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-0)