

I. Introduction

A. I spent part of this past week at a conference in Portland. A friend of mine leads a large foundation there – one that gives away about 50 million dollars a year – mostly to those working in science and education. But a bit of their funding goes to nonprofit groups, and I qualify as one of the old guys that get brought in to help younger non-profit leaders find their way. And this year, they had a two-day conference on learning from those outside your tribe. It was a bit disruptive, but good.

B. Oddly enough – is that it left me more hopeful. And that leads directly into my goals with today's sermon. I want to leave you more hopeful. But, that is probably a different thing than you think.

II. As you may know, our Advent series is called *A Thrill of Hope*. To understand what is behind that, you need to understand two things:

III. The first is Advent - the four-week period leading up to Christmas. It comes is from the Latin word *adventus* – which means arrival, often of a notable person.

A. In the church calendar, Christ's life is compressed into twelve months, so you rehearse the key moments – his birth, death, resurrection, etc. – every year. That means you squeeze the waiting time down to four weeks. Some of you like the idea of a nine-month pregnancy in four weeks. I get that. But the bigger point here is that Advent is a time of waiting – not just looking back and rethinking his first arrival, but also looking ahead to his second. But that's another sermon.

B. And, in addition to being a time of anticipation, Advent is also a dark time. Which means, we get it almost exactly wrong. We make the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day all about office parties and Starbucks' Peppermint Lattes. It's a time marked by frenetic shopping and overeating. It's all hustle and bustle until Christmas morning – after which we collapse. Advent, which is not the same thing as Christmas, is the preparation for Christmas. It's supposed to be quiet and reflective and dark – a key passage would be Isaiah 9 about “people walking in darkness.” Then, on the 25th, you make the transition to joy, for the 12 days of celebration, that takes you up to January 6th, the day of Epiphany.

1. The key take away I want you to have is that Advent is dark, reflective about hardship and struggle. We are supposed to put ourselves back into the mindset of the Jews, who have been waiting for the Messiah for over a thousand years; who have been living under Roman oppression for decades; who have not heard a peep from God for 400 years; Advent is about Mary's pregnancy scandal and Joseph's embarrassment.

2. So, Advent is dark, which is why if you listen to Advent songs – not Christmas hymns. Not *Joy to the World* or *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* or *Silent Night*. But Advent Hymns – which do not get sung much today, they reflect pain and darkness. They are in a minor key and describe desperate people in desperate situations – people in darkness, “lowly exiles” waiting.

IV. The second thing you need to understand to understand what is behind *A Thrill of Hope* is that hope is a very specific – and often misunderstood - thing.

A. Biblical hope is not to be confused with wishful thinking. In English we might say, “I hope I get Madden NFL 20.” Or, “I hope we have a white Christmas.” We desire certain things. The English term can mean that, but not the biblical term.

B. On a related note, biblical hope is not optimism. Again, the English term can be used to that way. If you think that the trends are encouraging, you say you are hopeful. I was encouraged by how the Bears played on Thursday night, so I am more hopeful about their upcoming game against the Packers. The English word hope works in that setting. Not the biblical term.

C. Biblical hope is the confidence we have that a faithful God is going to be faithful. That we can trust the promises we find in the Bible. And – key point – not only can we have hope. Not only can we be hopeful even when we can’t be optimistic. We are called to hope: 1) In I Corinthians 13, Paul writes about “faith, hope and love.” Calling on Christ-followers to be people who embody all three; 2) In I Peter 3:15, Peter writes that, we should “always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is within us.” Suggesting that those who follow Christ are expected to always be hopeful; and 3) the book of Revelation is a book about hope.

1. A few weeks back a number of us were in the Middle East – in the area the Bible refers to as Asia Minor. We were there in part to help with the REACH initiative of planting a church among Afghan refugees. Amazing work that we will talk more about next year. Well, while there we also did a tour of seven churches that Jesus calls out in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

2. The book of Revelation is written towards the end of the Apostle John’s life. All of the other apostles have been killed. Tradition suggests that they tried to kill him a couple times – boiling him in oil – but he lives. He has been banished to the island of Patmos. While there, one day while praying he has this vision of Christ in heaven. And it freaks him out. He had seen Jesus every day for three years. And even seen the resurrected Jesus. But he had not seen the glorified Christ in heaven. And he immediately falls on his face. And then Jesus says: take this down. I have messages for my followers living in Ephesus, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (the seven churches). And the essence of the message is, it’s going to get worse, but be hopeful. I am going to win and much better things await you on the other side.

3. The Book of Revelation is a hard book to work with because between chapters 4 and 20, we have this set of fantastic visions with multi-headed dragons and plagues and battles and seals. But the context is pretty simple. The Christians in Asia Minor have been suffering. Nero has been the Emperor. He has put Peter and Paul to death and persecuted others; he has blamed Christians for the burning of Rome. It’s been bad. Jesus sends these people a note because He knows that a new emperor is coming, named Domitian, and that under this new guy, things will be worse. Jesus is writing to people who are suffering to tell them that they are going to suffer even more. But, He tells them to be people of hope because He will win and an eternity of glory is ahead of them.

V. So... so far I have said: 1) I want you to be hopeful; 2) you need to know that Advent is a dark time; and 3) that hope is a specific thing – confidence that a faithful God will remain faithful. Which means, the challenge is how?

A. I assume that you get that if the Bible is true, we have every reason to have joy. I assume that you know enough to understand that if God is God and Christ is His Son and He really died in our place and went ahead to prepare a place for us, that that is a huge win. A thrilling win. We can have great joy.

B. But I also assume that this is easier said than done. Let's be honest, sometimes we are not hopeful. Sometimes, we lose hope. Sometimes circumstances seem to mock us. And we are hurting in unexpected ways, and we wonder what God is up to. Some of you are there right now.

C. Let's be honest. You are not only not optimistic, you are hopeless. It feels foolish to think God's promises are going to come true.

D. I say this because it can be my experience, and also because I see this view on display in the Bible.

1. Psalm 42 provides us with an example of someone wrestling with hope. The Psalmist asks: Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

2. Richard Sibbes, a 17th century Cambridge preacher, wrote a 175-page book about Psalm 42:5 – Hope in God! He titled it, *The Soul's Conflict with Itself*, because that is what Ps. 42 is about. When you read it you realize that the Psalmist is wrestling with his own thoughts. On the one hand, he is looking at his circumstances and feeling depressed. On the other, he is looking at the promises of God. And he is trying to have his mood more shaped by the second than the first.

E. That isn't always easy to do. Sometimes we have to fight for it.

F. Today I want to offer you some reasons to be hopeful. Today I want to offer you some reasons to believe that God is God, that the Bible is His Word, that the Gospel is true and that promises that have been made are certain. Today I want to give you reasons to have a greater sense of confidence that will lead to greater hope and joy.

VI. If you have been here for a while, you know that

A. I talk about this kind of thing a fair bit because faith didn't come easy to me. I have a skeptical bent that leads me to keep asking questions. And given the skepticism of our present culture, I know that some of you need to be reminded of the reasons we have to believe.

B. If you have been here a while you also know that this takes us into a field of theology called apologetics. Which is a word we get from the I Peter 3:15 passage I cited earlier. It is the passage where we are told to be ready to offer a defense for the hope that is within us. The Greek word for defense is *apologia*. Apologetics comes from this word. It is the defense of the faith – an explanation and rationale for our hope in God.

C. And if you have been here a while you know that the field of apologetics breaks into a handful of categories.

1. For instance, there are arguments for the existence of God – some are philosophical, such as the ontological argument; some are more scientific in their approach – like the cosmological and teleological.

2. In a different realm, there are apologetic reasons to trust the Bible. Some look at the bibliographic evidence, some look at its internal consistency and others look at its external support.

3. On a related note, there are arguments based on prophecy – such as all of the predictions made about Jesus. Some of which are uniquely Christmas prophecies – such as Micah 5:2

4. There are lots of reasons to believe based on Christ's life, His teaching, the miracles, his impact and the resurrection.

5. There is another approach to apologetics that, instead of arguing that Christianity is true, seeks to undo other worldviews. This is what Francis Schaeffer did in the 70s and 80s.

D. When I was younger, I was most taken by the philosophical arguments and the historical arguments around Jesus. After my stroke, I realized that, while I was no less moved by the historical and philosophical arguments, I was now more moved by my sense of God's presence when I was so utterly helpless.

E. Well, today I want to look at something that has encouraged me more over the last five years than other things.

1. This falls in part over reasons we can trust the Bible. But they are unique. It is the way The Book holds together. It is the way the Bible is woven together in such remarkable ways – to my mind, supernatural ways.

F. And the easiest way to show this is to point out some of the ways Jesus shows up in the Old Testament.

VII. Over the years, we have done different things during the four weeks leading up to Christmas: sermons on the Gospel accounts, particularly Luke 2; sermons exploring Christmas doctrines, such as the incarnation and Virgin Birth; there have been sermons that unpack the theology behind Advent and Christmas Hymns; we've looked at the prophecies.

A. Last week, Ben launched this year's series out of Romans 5. He looked briefly at hope and then turned to Romans to a passage in which Jesus is presented as the Second Adam.

B. Today I want to do a fly over of the Old Testament – the Hebrew Scriptures – and point out a half dozen different ways Jesus shows up. Which, in some ways, is a continuation of last Sunday night's service of Lessons and Carols. One of my frustrations about that service is that so much of what is happening – what is being said - is lost on people

C. I suspect some of the ways Jesus is referenced in the Old Testament has escaped your notice. But I believe these would be some of the things Jesus pointed out to the men he walked with along the road to Emmaus. This is the Luke 24 passage that was read at the start of the service. Just after his resurrection, Jesus is walking with a few men on the road to Emmaus. They are talking about the crazy reports coming out of Jerusalem about this man who has supposedly risen from the dead. And they are all confused. And then, in verse 25, Jesus says to them:

1. “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures (which at the time, was all Old Testament) concerning himself.

D. I really, really wish the Bible recorded what Jesus said. But, I wasn’t consulted. But the good news is, once you start to see them, I think they become easier to find. We start to see that Jesus has been hiding in plain site.

E. There are five general categories of ways.

VIII. First, Jesus shows up in the Names and titles of God. Jesus is implied by the titles and references to God.

A. This starts with the initial mention of God in Genesis 1:1. **In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth.** The word used here for God – Elohim – is plural. The word for God is El, the “ohim” is what makes it plural. When the term is used to refer to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it is always plural.

1. Of course, we also see this in the New Testament. John 1 opens saying, “In the beginning was the Word – the logos, Jesus – and he was in the beginning with God and He was God and all things were created through him, and apart from him nothing was created that was created.

2. And by the way, it is worth noting that the idea of Jesus being present at Creation – being there before anything else happens, being not just immortal but being eternal – was the point made in the Nicene Creed. The very first time the church leaders got together it was to beat down the idea, advanced by a guy named Arius, that Jesus was just ever so slightly less than God the Father.

B. There are other points to make around the names and titles of God.

1. In Genesis 1:26, where we read that God said, “let us make man in our image.”

2. And, we have the amazing John 8 passage, where Jesus claims the covenant name of God. This happens in a little dust up with the Pharisees that ends with him the debate over Abraham and Jesus saying, “before Abraham was, I AM.”

IX. Second, Jesus shows up in the prophecies, starting with Genesis 3:15 – which is not only the first statement of the Gospel – the Good News – it is the first prophecy in the Bible.

A. It reads: **And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”**

B. I dislike the NIV translation here. They use the word *offspring*. The LXX uses the word *spermatos*. Most texts refer to the seed of woman. All of which do a better job of emphasizing that this birth will be unique. Indeed, it will be a virginal conception.

C. A couple hundred Messianic prophecies follow:

1. In Micah 5:2 , we are told that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem
2. In Isaiah 7:14, we are told that He will be born of a Virgin
3. In Zechariah 9:9 we are told he will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey;
4. In Zech 11 we are told he will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver

5. In 2 Samuel 7 we are told he will be from the tribe of David;
6. In Isaiah 53, we see his death by crucifixion described – even though at the time crucifixion had not been invented.
- D. The point is, once you know the story, these passages start to jump off the page. You realize how supernatural this book is.
- X. A third way we see Jesus in the Old Testament is via a handful of Christophanies.
- A. A *theophany* is an appearance of God. In Greek, *theos* is the word for God, and *phaino* is the word for appear. So, a theophany is an appearance of God – such as the Burning Bush, or the fire that leads them through the desert.
- B. A Christophany is an appearance of Christ before his incarnation. This is always a shock in the Bible study I lead. But, Jesus is God. Unlike you and me. His existence did not start with his birth. He pre-existed his birth. The claim is that He has always existed as God. At the incarnation he took on flesh (*carnos*)
- C. Well, there are a few occasions of the Pre-incarnate Christ in the Old Testament.
1. In Genesis 18, three “people” appear with Abraham. It later becomes obvious that two are angels and one is great than an angel.
 2. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with a “man.” But we are later told that it is not a man, but God.
 3. In Daniel 3, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego are thrown into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar when they will not bow down to him. But Neb sees four in the furnace, and the one is like a Son of God. Yes! It’s Jesus.
- D. There isn’t time in this fly over to tease these things out, but in each case we have someone – twice referred to as an Angel of the Lord. But the way it is written, the way He is worshipped, the things that He does makes it pretty clear that this is not just an angel, it is Christ.
- XI. A fourth way Jesus shows up in the Old Testament is through things or events that foreshadow who He is. I have talked about written about this a lot.
- A. In the Old Testament, God elevates three offices: Prophets, priests and kings. Well, in the New Testament we see that Jesus is the Greatest Prophet, He is our High Priest and He is the King of Kings. The people in those offices are helping us prepare for Jesus. The less than perfect prophets, priests and kings make us long for a perfect one.
- B. Throughout the Old Testament a central idea is the need for a sacrifice – an innocent third party who will die in the place of another. It comes up over and over. Well, all of those sacrifices are pointing ahead to Jesus. In fact, they were place holders for him. We are told in Hebrews that the blood of animals
- C. Speaking of sacrifices, we have the famous Abraham and Isaac event. A few weeks ago, I shared this again, and I got more calls. Do you mean to tell me that that was the same mountain? Well, I’ll say this: if you go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, there is a plaque there saying, this is the spot where Abraham tied up Isaac.

D. And speaking of sacrifices – which were first offered at the Tabernacle and then at the Temple – Jesus claims to be the temple. Think about it: the temple was the place where God and mankind met. It was the place you went for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the true temple. He replaces the building. And that is exactly what he claims in John 2:19, when he says, “destroy this building and in three days I will rebuild it.”

E. Jesus is the new and better Job – who innocently suffered. Jesus is the one Jonah was pointing to. With the three days he was in the belly of a fish being a foreshadowing of the three days Christ spent in the grave.

F. Jesus steps in to be the perfect Israel. Think about it. They are the people God works through; they are called out of Egypt; they are expected to keep the law; they spend forty years in the desert; and then, they emerge as 12 tribes. Well, Jesus is the one selected by God to work through; He is called out of Egypt; He is expected to keep the law; he spends forty days in the desert undergoing temptations; and he selects 12 disciples.

G. There are lots of other ways, which you miss until someone calls them out. And sometimes that someone is Jesus himself. In Luke 1, he claims to be Jacob’s Ladder.

XII. Next week I am going to go deep instead of wide and unpack one of these in greater detail. Because I want you to see how much more amazing this book is than you think, so you will have more hope. do not make sense until he calls them out.

XIII. But today I want to point out that the Bible – a book written over 1,600 years by 40 different authors in three languages and on three continents - is not a collection of stories and advice. It is a unit. It is one story – and this story points to Christ and it is woven together in ways that defy explanation other than, God was inspiring the human authors.

XIV. Now, you may think, well, good for you. But this is not something I know how to see. Right, except, no one is preventing you from spending more time with the Book.

A. This week The Atlantic has an article about Timothy Keller.

B. And in it, he notes, a lot of American Christians are frustrated with their relationship with God. But the fact is, if you spend 16 hours a day absorbing secularism, one hour in church is not going to be enough.