

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16  
Theme: Longing for Hope

Sermon Series: ANTICIPATION

Has the countdown begun at your house? “What countdown?” you might be thinking. The countdown to Christmas! As we start Advent this Sunday, it’s a reminder that Christmas is coming soon. Did that sneak up on anyone else? It feels like November just flew by and Thanksgiving was just a couple of days ago. Some of you maybe bought a Christmas tree over the weekend or if it’s an artificial one, got it out of storage. Soon Christmas decorations will be taken out of the closet and put up inside and outside the house. Soon Christmas movies and Christmas classics will be all over TV stations. If it hasn’t happened already, stores will be filled with Christmas decorations, sales, and music in the building. What are you anticipating this Christmas? The music? Christmas cookies? Gifts? A break from work or school? The special services at church? Decorating the Christmas tree? Our new series, ANTICIPATION, is all about the excitement, eagerness, and joy that comes with getting ready to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Each week we meet different individuals in God’s Word who are looking forward to the Messiah and what he comes to bring us.

The countdown to Christmas is not anything new, or even unique to our time or place in history. In fact, the countdown started when God made that first promise of a Savior to Adam and Eve. The countdown continued throughout the centuries and God continually reminded his people that Christ is coming. He sent prophets, like the one we will be talking about this morning, Jeremiah, who echoed the call, “Christ is coming!” A message that was extremely important to believers of the Old Testament who were longing for hope. A message that is meaningful to you and me as we anticipate the coming of our Savior.

If you were to go back to the time of Jeremiah, it looked like there wasn’t much for God’s people, the believers, to be hopeful about. Allow me to give you a short Old Testament history lesson. Jeremiah was a prophet in Jerusalem about 600 years before Jesus was born. It was right before the invasion of the Babylonians, when Nebuchadnezzar’s army would bulldoze the city, pillage the temple, and take the people into exile. The Babylonians were God’s instrument to bring judgment on the people of Israel. You might be thinking why would God punish his own people? Because time and time again, the Israelites had given up following the Lord and were worshiping false gods of wood and stone. Seeing this idolatry by his own people, brought about God’s anger and punishment. But before this happened, God sent Jeremiah to tell the people to repent and return to the one true God. To tell the Israelites if they don’t turn from their sins they will face God’s judgment in this life and the next. Telling the people: **“this is what the Lord Almighty says: I am going to bring disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods.....I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn.”**

As you may have guessed, Jeremiah’s ministry was extremely difficult. Mostly because his preaching was rejected by the people. They didn’t want to hear that their nation in peril. So they listened to false prophets who promised peace. No one wanted to hear they needed to repent or they were in trouble with God. Instead they continued to do whatever they wanted: idolatry, immorality, corruption, dishonesty, it didn’t really matter.

Imagine being one of those remnant of believers in all of this. Imagine what was going on in their hearts. And that’s the first point on our notes: **God’s people of old longed for hope and salvation.** They longed for this because they knew what was coming. They heard and believed the words of Jeremiah. They knew the Babylonians were going to knock down the walls of the city and overpower the people. They knew exile awaited them. It may have looked like the church or the believers weren’t going to last. And to make matters worse, it seemed like no one had the sense or awareness to see what was happening. People who may have wondered if God was still with them? People who knew they not blameless in all of this, they too had disobeyed God and broken his commandments. Would there be any sign that things would be better one day? They were yearning for God’s help, his promises, and his deliverance. Both physically and spiritually.

Fast forward to today. Like Jeremiah and that remnant of faithful Israelites, some of us here maybe longing for a better world. When we look around, we see a pretty similar picture. Not too much has changed when it comes to sin in the 2600 years. We see immorality, wickedness, greed, selfishness, and dishonesty just like they did. We see idolatry of different sorts. We see people ignoring the truth of God's Word.

Sometimes we can fool ourselves into thinking we have the answers. The world wouldn't be so bad if...how would you fill in that blank? This world wouldn't be so bad if Christians weren't being challenged, silenced, or threatened. This world wouldn't be so bad if people stopped paying so much attention to their phone or social media. This would all be fixed if the Republicans did this or the Democrats did that...It would be better if people didn't keep messing up the Bible...It would be better if music and TV didn't demoralize our children. While many, if not all, of these things are true, before we blame everything and everyone around us, let's remember that we too are sinful. Before we start thinking everything around us is wrong, let's look at ourselves and see that sin is a part of who we are. That wickedness, that dishonesty, that greed or selfishness that we see around us is also who we are by nature. And the sins we have committed are no more honorable than the sins of anyone else. Like the people of Jeremiah's time, we are still yearning for God's promises and deliverance. And that's the next point on our notes: **God's people today still need a Savior.**

Now look at this amazing promise God gave to his people then and gives to you and me today: **"The days are coming, when I will fulfill the gracious promise, I made to the house of Israel and Judah...I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord our Righteousness."**

Remember the context. God had told the Israelites that judgment is coming. That remnant was looking for something to hold on to. And in the midst of disobedience, God promises righteousness. He promises to them a Savior. He promises that he is going to preserve his people and forgive them. And here's what that means for you and me: God forgives the failure, which I am all too often. God forgives the knowingly disobedient, which I am more than I care to admit. God forgives the justification I offer for my sins. He does all this because he wants you to see the enormous nature of his love. But unless we see that sin for ourselves, we cannot see how desperately we need the Lord our Righteousness. Once we see how helpless we are on our own, we cannot help but be devoted to the only option we have: our Savior Jesus Christ.

The believers during Jeremiah's time longed for this promise to come. Soon they would look to their city and see it destroyed, and no stone of the temple was left on another. Everything they held dear would be taken away from them. Yet God would continue to watch over his people. God gave his people hope because they had the promise that there will be One who would save them for eternity. He would give them safety from sin, death, and hell. They knew he would be the Lord, their righteous Savior. We know him too, because he has already come. And he comes to give us what our hearts need.

That's the last point on our notes: **Jesus comes to give us what we are longing for.** I'm not talking about material things; I'm not talking about the things that really matter. Does guilt and shame ever burden you? Jesus has come to wash away the stains of sin and covers us with forgiveness. Do we have worries about what is going to happen tomorrow, or what await us in the future? Jesus comes to give you security. He comes to give you assurance knowing that he is in complete control; he has all authority in heaven and earth. Maybe it's love or feeling unloved. Jesus has given you unconditional grace, love that is consistent for you every day. Is there sadness in your heart? Are you longing to have peace? Jesus knows what you're feeling and he not only is with you, but gives you his peace. Peace that surpasses understanding, peace with an Almighty God. Maybe we're longing for a better world, maybe we're longing for things to go back to normal. Jesus did not promise to give us heaven on earth, but he did come so that one day we will be in heaven. A place where there will no more pain or suffering, a place where will never be disappointed, but will be in the presence of God's love and glory forever. A Savior who promises us in his Word, **"If God is for us, who can**

**be against us? He who did not spare his own, but gave him up for us all, how will he – not also along with him, graciously give us all things?"**

And Jesus has given us all the things we are longing for: righteousness, forgiveness, security, peace with God, a better and perfect world in heaven. He can give you these things because he is the Righteous Branch who always did was right and just as he lived a sinless life in our place. Righteousness that is now yours through faith in him. And because of him, God sees you and me as his sons and daughters who have been washed clean by the blood of Christ. Because this is true you have hope. You have hope for today, for tomorrow. You have hope that lasts for an eternity.

Christmas is coming soon. What are you anticipating? I'm looking forward to listening to Christmas music, not the secularized stuff, but real Christmas music that reminds me what we are actually celebrating. I anticipate gifts from family and friends. I anticipate Christmas cookies. We anticipate these things because normally we don't have them. But most importantly I'm looking forward to the coming of my Savior who has filled the longings of my heart. So this year let's build the anticipation. Because the baby lying in a manger in Bethlehem isn't just cute, isn't just going to get an angel chorus to welcome him, isn't just going to grow up to do some amazing things. The baby in the manger is God himself stepping into our sinful lives to make us whole again, to give us new life, and to bring forgiveness for every one of our sins. My friends, if that's what you're longing for this Advent, then say: Amen.