



Advent **(Week 1/4) Hope: The Promise of a Saviour**

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *Plan and pray for opportunities to share the good news of God's salvation with people in your life.*

Warm-Up

1. As a child, what did you hope for most at Christmas time? *What are you more likely to hope for today?*
2. Why do you think there has been an 'erosion of hope' in Australia in recent years?

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

3. When someone is facing a difficult time, do people ever have a tendency (even a well-meaning one) to try 'reframe' the situation by downplaying it, sugarcoating it, or spinning it? *Is this helpful?*
4. According to Isaiah, what is the condition that the people of God are currently walking in?
5. How serious is the 'darkness' that they are in the thick of? Was any of it of their own doing?
6. How does this contrast to the future that God is promising *through Isaiah*?
7. Why do you think that Isaiah describes this good news as a light shining in the darkness?
8. Have you ever felt trapped in the (physical) dark before? How did you feel when light broke?
9. Has there ever been a time in your life that felt dark? Did knowing Jesus make a difference?
10. What type of King is the hope of Isaiah dependent on? (cf. have a look at his titles and explain them.)
11. What is the shape of his Kingdom? (cf. look for all of the various descriptors for this future.)
12. How is it clear that this type of hope is only possible through what the Lord will accomplish?
13. What do you think most people hope for today? What gives them confidence for this hope?
14. Why is it a relief to know that the greatest hope that we can know is not dependent on us?

Read Matthew 4:12-21

15. What has just happened to John? Where does Jesus now withdraw to?
16. What is significant about where Jesus goes? What does Matthew want us to join?
17. If Jesus is the long-awaited King, the light shining in the darkness, who is this good news for?
18. What is the darkness that Jesus will overcome? How has Jesus overcome this darkness?
19. Why does looking back to the cross and resurrection give us confidence about Jesus' return?
20. If the hope that Jesus brings is a gift, how do we receive it?
21. Has there been a time when you found it difficult to wait? What helped you to wait?
22. Is the hope that Jesus brings require a response? According to Jesus, what is that response?

Apply *How can waiting for Jesus' return be a way to train you more-and-more in hope?*

Pray *Saving God, we thank you that Jesus is the promised Saviour and therefore the source of our ultimate hope. Please help us to rest and delight in him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

GOING DEEPER

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On Your Front Line this Week

How can you use this Advent season to demonstrate God's generosity?

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* "Light in the Darkness" by Tim Keller: <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/light-in-the-darkness/>
- *Listen (sermon):* "A Call to Hope" by Pete Wilkinson: <https://stebbes.org/sermons/a-call-to-hope/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* "The Light of Christmas" by Pete Wilkinson: <https://stebbes.org/sermons/the-light-of-christmas/#sermons>
- *Read (research):* "The Erosion of Hope" by ANU: <https://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/files/docs/2025/3/Erosion-of-hope---For-web.pdf>

Series Resources

- *Read:* "Advent (Fullness of Time Series)" by Tish Harrison Warren. 📖
- *Devotional:* "Sing in Exultation" by Jonanthan Landry Cruse. 📖
- *Devotional:* "The One True Gift" by Tim Chester. 📖
- *Devotional:* "Advent for Everyone: Luke" by Tom Wright. 📖
- *Read:* "What Christians Ought to Believe" by Michael Bird. 📖
- *Read:* "Is Christmas Unbelievable" by Rebecca McLaughlin. 📖
- *Read:* "The God who Became Human" by Graham Cole. <https://bit.ly/3g68RBj>
- *Read:* "On the Incarnation" by Athanasius. <https://bit.ly/3E5gLmB>
- *Watch:* "The Word Becomes Human" by the Bible Project. <https://bit.ly/3UEL8HB>
- *Watch:* "The Incarnation (Spoken Word)" by Humble Word. <https://bit.ly/3OhgPUP>
- *Listen:* A Carols Playlist (curated by the St Bart's staff team): <https://spoti.fi/3OaIsTK>

ADVENT

*Week 1/4 “Hope: The Promise of a Saviour”
by the Rev’d Adam Lowe (30/11/2025)*

소망 - 구원자의 언약 | noth- Bëën dë Dulëëk
நம்பிக்கை - இரட்சகரைப் பற்றிய வாக்கு

Bible Passage: Isaiah 9:1-7 and Matthew 4:12-21

*Saving God, we thank you that Jesus is the promised Saviour and the source of our ultimate hope.
Please help us to rest and delight in him. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

A recent study by the Australian National University reports that Australians have experienced a marked erosion of hope over the past half a decade. In fact that’s even what they called the report! *The Erosion of Hope!* / Despite various economic and employment indicators remaining relatively stable, or even improving, Australians on the whole are less satisfied with life and more pessimistic about the future.

Despite the freedom we have, the absence of war, and the relative prosperity we enjoy, Australians are about as satisfied with life as they were during COVID lockdowns. /

- Hope is on the decline. // I don’t really know how it started, but whenever there is a fast-approaching birthday in our household, it doesn’t take long before the upcoming birthday celebrant, affixes a list of gifts to the fridge that they’re *hoping to receive*.
- You can’t miss it. Super subtle. Sometimes they’re dreaming, but it is really interesting to *see what they’re hoping for*.
- The kind of things that they’re hoping to receive.
- We all do that to some degree.
- You might not write a list of things and stick it to the fridge, but heart-of-hearts we’re all hoping for something.
- When hopes go unfulfilled *they can crush us*.
But the strange thing is, that realised hopes *can crush us, too*,
when we discover that they’re not everything that we need them to be.

Some might say, well, that's why I maintain very low hopes.
Others, might say, that's why I've given up hoping altogether. To be a fatalist. (Lots of fun!)
But there is a third way. The third way is not to lower your expectations. Or to give up hoping.
But to have a better hope. An ultimate hope. A real and lasting hope,
that can triumph even through the tumults of life.

*That doesn't just give us confidence for tomorrow,
but also has the power to take a grip on today.*

- That's precisely the type of hope Christmas claims to be:
That *the* light of *real and lasting* hope has dawned in Jesus.
- That's the claim. / So today, let's put it to the test. /
- Is this a hope that we can rely on?
Is this a hope that is powerful enough for our lives and for our world? /
- There are all sorts of theories about the nature of hope,
but I think in order for hope to be *real* and *lasting* it must have three key ingredients.
- Real hope acknowledges reality: *it's not just blind optimism.*
Real hope comes from the outside: *because we can't generate on our own.*
Real hope can be known: *not just from a distance, but it can take a grip on our lives.*

So as we come to Isaiah 9 today, let's work through those three key ingredients..

- **Hope Acknowledges Reality; Hope Comes from the Outside; and Hope Can be Known.**

HOPE ACKNOWLEDGES REALITY | VERSES 1-7

소망은 현실을 인정합니다 (어둠 속의 빛) | nōth dē Nyōth dē yic (Ǝëir nē Chuöl yic)
நம்பிக்கை. உண்மை நிலவரம் ஏற்றுக்கொள்ளும். (இருளில் வெளிச்சம்)

First, **Real hope acknowledges reality** — it is light in the darkness. *Isaiah 9, verse 2...*

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

As Isaiah addresses the people of God, he doesn't try to sugar coat, ignore, or spin how bad their *present and impending* predicament really is!

- If you've ever faced a difficult circumstance that feels pretty hopeless, you know just how unhelpful it feels when people, even with the best intentions, sometimes try to sugar coat, ignore, or spin **your** situation.
- *It's not that bad. Don't dwell on it. This is an opportunity.* /
- That's not to say that sometimes we're not in need of some perspective, but it's generally really not helpful when people dismiss the depth of what you're facing
- Isaiah doesn't do that. He doesn't cloak the gravity of their circumstances at all. He says: the people of God are gripped by fear, distress, and gloom.

- They are in the **thick of darkness**.
Living in a land of **deep darkness**.
On a trajectory of **utter darkness**.
- And he's not exaggerating. It was a time of extraordinary upheaval.
- *The Assyrians are on the rise, they are pressing in, and triumphing through war.*
The northern kingdom is teetering on the edge of collapse.
And there's a sense that Judah could be next.
- And to make matters worse, *as Isaiah plainly lays out in at the end of chapter 8*,
part of the darkness they are facing is of their own doing.
- They've turned away from God. They're morally bankrupt.
And instead of consulting God's Word and heeding his warnings,
they've turned to mediums and spiritists, seeking to consult the dead!
- It's an absolute mess and they're looking for help in all the wrong places. /
- We of course can still do that today.
In the thick of trouble, sometimes people go to all the wrong places for help.
Some — like the people of God — will do weird and wacky spiritual things. / That's bad.
But as equally problematic — we're far more likely just to turn to ourselves.
- It might sound less dramatic, but it is no less unhelpful. It has the same effect.
Because it's all looking away from the one — the only one — who is the source of true hope.

Yet Isaiah says, it is right into this very darkness that light has dawned.

- The darkness has been pierced with a promise that it will not always be dark. //

Last year when the family and I were travelling overseas, I had a day when I went out on a long bike ride that was about 95% stunning and 5% scary. There were plenty of tunnels that I had to go through, which were on the whole fine, except for one, which was completely unlit. In fact the only light in the tunnel was from cars passing at high speed and at close proximity. / I think the tunnel was only 4 kilometers long, but it felt like 40. I had no idea when I would emerge on the other side. It felt like it was going to go on forever. In the thick of darkness, no matter how fast I peddled, I just didn't seem to be making any progress? It was closing in on me.

- *Do you ever feel like that? Like the darkness is never going to end? Or that it might even get worse?*
- The people of God certainly did. *They were putting their hope in all sorts of foolish things*,
but all it resulted in is more darkness.
- False hope and no hope both have the same fruit: despair. //

When I was riding in that tunnel and a glimmer of light finally pierced the darkness, it was the most extraordinary relief. I wasn't out of trouble, but I knew that trouble was going to end.

That's what Isaiah is pointing them to. That's what Isaiah points us to. Of a time in which:

- Instead of death *there would be life*. / Instead of defeat *there would be victory*.
Instead of oppression *there would be freedom*.

- This time is not just a momentary hope, but a permanent future.
- That's what is meant by the warrior's boots garments bloodstained by war, being thrown into fire. They'll be burned because there would be no need for them.
- Imagine a time, not only when every war would cease, but there would be no more again.
- When every aspect of the military apparatus could be permanently put away, because there would be no threat in the present and also no future threat.
- This is not just about the absence of war, but the rule of God's Kingdom.
- It's a future in which God would reign forever. A time of justice and righteousness.
- *It's an image of new creation. /*
- Can you imagine that? Can you see the light?
- God knows our darkness. *The darkness pressed upon us. The darkness of our own doing.* This light is also for us. /
- That time, Isaiah says, is not just wishful thinking, or an alternate reality, or a clever spin to distract you on the mess, **but it is a transforming reality whilst we wait.**
- That's the type of hope which Isaiah says God has promised *for everyone.*
- *Hope that doesn't simply acknowledge reality, but hope that enters into it, and transforms it.*
- Light in the darkness.

HOPE COMES FROM THE OUTSIDE | ISAIAH 9:6-7

소망은 외부로부터 옵니다 (하나님께서 주시는 구원) | ṇōth - Bō nē b.Bāṇ bei yic (Luāk tē nōṅ Nhialic)
நம்பிக்கை வெளியிலிருந்து வருகிறது. (இரட்சிப்பு கர்த்தரிடமிருந்து வருகிறது.)

Second ingredient for hope is that:

it comes from the outside — it is salvation from God. Verse 6...

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The promise of a better future is only as good as the likelihood of it becoming a reality! //

One of our kids, will often make very generous offers that when we retire, that they'll look after us, set us up at the beach, and take care of the bills — *but as good as that sounds, I'm not I'm super confident that will eventuate.*

- Isaiah says, the reason that we can have confidence of this hope, is because it comes from outside of us, it is *no less than complete salvation from God.* /
- This is radically counter-cultural.
- We're told over-and-over again, not only that we are the architects of our own hopes and dreams, but if you search deep enough then you will find the resources to make it a reality.

- There's no doubt that God has made humankind with extraordinary capabilities. But you don't also have to get too far in life before you rub against our hard limits.
- God's people thought they could do it without God. They're in part facing the judgement for the path they've chosen. But now, as they face the cold dark reality of their circumstances, their delusion of self-reliance and independence from God is crumbling.
- And so Isaiah, in a way, is saying: Good News.
- You're not the source of your own salvation. You can't be. But real hope, the only hope that will do, is coming to you.
- // *That moment — or those repeating moments — when we realise that we can't do it on our own, can feel so difficult. Even like failure by worldly standards. But often it means we're seeing clearly. But don't just stop there. Turn to the one who has come to you.*

Note Isaiah makes that point in two ways:

- Specifically: That this hope will be made real
verse 6: Through a child who will be born (spoiler alert: Jesus); and
- Broadly: Verse 7: It's the Lord Almighty — his zeal — which will accomplish this.
- That word 'zeal' is amazing. It doesn't mean that this is God's passion project for now, but that this is the Lord's loving initiative, to which he is 100% personally committed to, and has the power to make it a reality. *He is willing and he is able. And even better: has done it.*

- That's why in the thick of utter darkness that they can be confident. If it was dependent on them, they'd be doomed. But it's dependent on the Lord, who will bring salvation. //
- Salvation through God's *forever* King. Salvation into God's *forever* Kingdom.
- **This King** — God's forever King — is so full of beauty and majesty, *that he doesn't just have one name, but has four:*
- Wonderful counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace.
- He'll rule and reign with justice and righteousness *forever*. /
- **This Kingdom** — God's forever Kingdom — is so perfect, that its greatness and peace have no comparison; and its greatness and peace *have no end!*
- The reason that we can be confident of this hope, that it's not fake, is because God is the one who will bring it into being.

That should come as great relief to us.

- If you want to know *real and lasting hope*, you don't have to come up with it on your own.
- If you've ever felt trapped in the thick of darkness, *you don't have to chart your own way out.*
- If you have ever felt overwhelmed by the darkness of this world, the light of hope has already dawned.

HOPE CAN BE KNOWN | MATTHEW 4

소망은 알 수 있습니다 (그의 이름은 예수입니다) | Lǝjiin dë Kǝk juäny Yëcu cök
நம்பிக்கையை அறிய முடியும். (அவர் பெயர் இயேசு)

*The incredible news is that this **HOPE CAN BE KNOWN** — you can know this hope, because *hope has a name*. // Matthew 4, verse 12...*

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

Matthew tells us that out of all the places where Jesus could launch his preaching ministry, he does so in *Capernaum, by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, in the region of Galilee*.

Do you see what is happening here?

- Matthew’s joined the dots!
- That’s why he quotes from Isaiah 9. Jesus is the one!
- Seven *plus* centuries *after* Isaiah proclaimed God’s promise, that day has arrived in Jesus.
- In the darkness of this land — John the Baptist has just been arrested, Matthew recognises that Jesus is the promised great light.

- On those living in the land of the shadow of death, *a light, THE LIGHT, has dawned*, and his name is Jesus.
- He hasn’t just entered into our darkness, but on the cross, he’ll take all of the darkness—of sin and death—on himself, and defeat it!
- His light doesn’t just pierce the darkness, but it overcomes it!

That has at least three implications.

- **First:**

HOPE is not just something we can know in theory, but something we can know personally.
You can know it for yourself, because that hope is bound up in a person: the person of Jesus Christ.

- **Second:**

HOPE is not something that might happen, but something that has and will.
Jesus has died. Jesus is risen. And as surely as he defeated the grave, Jesus will return to bring his work to completion. You can count on that.

- Christians hope not in anxious wishfulness, but a confident assurance that is concretely anchored to the resurrection.

- **Third:**

The HOPE that Jesus offers requires a response. It is a gift being offered to us.
Did you hear that in Isaiah 9: To us a child is GIVEN. Not earnt. This is grace to be received.

- It's no wonder, that as Matthew has just joined the dots, that he's keen for us to see, that as Jesus launches his ministry the very first thing that he proclaims is:

Verse 7, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

- The people of God had turned from the Lord.
- But Jesus came to invite us to turn back to him.
When he said that *the kingdom of heaven has come near*,
Jesus didn't mean that it was geographically around the corner.
He means that it's come near, it's arrived in him!
- And the only way into that Kingdom is by turning to the King.
- Jesus is saying that I've come. I'll die for you. I'm going to rise victoriously, too
And the real and lasting hope that I'm offering you is a gift.
You don't need to earn it, you just need to turn to me to receive it.
- If hope has a name, grasping it means calling on him.
- When you do that, it doesn't just give you confidence for tomorrow,
but it has the power to transform today.
- Through every trial. Through every storm. Even through the darkness.
In fact, when your confidence is in Jesus and you know how it will end,
instead of eroding our hope, it can instead train and grow our hope in him.

"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, (as Corrie ten Boom put it) you don't throw away your ticket and jump off. You trust the engineer to bring you through."

- That doesn't mean it is always easy. But it does mean that it is never hopeless.
- It's why, when we're in the thick of darkness, even darkness of our own doing,
we must not only turn to the Lord — for he is the bringer of salvation,
but we should do everything that helps us to plumb the depths of his hope.
Surround ourselves with God's people, the people of hope. / *We wait with confidence.*

Weeks ahead of one of those birthday celebrations in our household, I was surprised one day to discover not only a birthday list, but some of those things had a line through them! When I asked Giovanna, what that was about, she said, Oh, because someone is getting me that. *No one had told her, but I did love her bold confidence.*

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Our hope isn't based on a whim, it's based on the one.

- If your hope is in anyone or anything else, you'd better keep it small.
- But when your hope is in Jesus, you can spend your whole lifetime growing into the greatest hope ever known by depending on it over-and-over again.
- A hope that doesn't just have the promise of breaking the darkness of sin and death;
but a hope that already has.