

The Promise Revealed in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Good morning, everyone. My name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here. So good to be with you. Hope everyone is doing well and had a good Christmas and is ready for a new year. Last one of 2024. She's gone, right? Moving into the next one. And this actually is one of my favorite times of year, this period between Christmas and New Year's, partly because I feel like everybody just sort of jointly agrees for the most part to just take a beat, right? Like we can all like maybe relax for like eight minutes, like all the things we thought were that important aren't quite that important and just take a minute. But I also do think that it's a great time of year to really just look back and reflect on where you've been the last year. You know, like those Facebook things that pop up that were like then and now, you know, and it never surprises me when I look back and I think back to like January 1 of this year, how different things are. And I don't primarily mean, though this is certainly the case, like, you know, it could have been a big year of change, like your job or where you live or your family.

Those things certainly change. But one of the things that I like to look back on is, what was I worried or anxious about at the beginning of last year? What were the things that were preoccupying my mind? Like if I thought back, what were those things? And many of the times it's funny because you look back and you go, man, those things seem silly now. Like whatever I was worried about then doesn't even seem like a distant memory. And then there's like other things that may have grown, like things that you couldn't have anticipated that are now the things that kind of preoccupy you.

They've grown in importance. I also like to think about what did my walk with Jesus look like? Was I empty or was I full? What am I now? You know? And I like that exercise not really as a way to make myself feel guilty, right? Like the point isn't to go back and critique all the ways that I could have done better. I think that's one of the fallacies of like New Year's resolutions, right? It's like you look back specifically for the purpose of thinking, how bad am I in every possible area and trying to resolve how you're going to be good. And then when you ultimately fail at doing that next thing, right, you feel even worse about yourself. I don't think that's the point of the exercise.

I like it as a way to, on the one hand, sort of remember the ways that God has been faithful that I probably forgot about, right? Like I can think back over the course of this last year and think of like two or three places where I was like, I was just honestly not sure how a situation was going to resolve. And like God stepped into it in a crazy way. And that builds our faith, right? Like that seeing and remembering that He does surprising things satisfies our soul. But I also remember that, and this happens to me every year, like whatever the year was, I realized at the end of it, I'm not satisfied. Like I haven't seen whatever God did, I haven't seen all of God I want to see.

And there are still, no matter how good the year was, there are still things that are broken and unresolved that I want to be fixed. And there's, it's like this itch that never really gets scratched, right? Like not fully. It doesn't matter how good a year it is financially or career-wise. It doesn't matter if I had some epiphany of knowledge or some great family joy. It's like it never seems like it's enough. Like there's always some part of me that just feels like it's, I'm not satisfied. And you might say, you know, that kind of sounds like a you problem, Elliot. And you know, you might very well be right. But I would bet I'm not the only one in here who feels like that from time to time.

[4 : 05] That no matter what goes on, there's some part of you that just never feels completely satisfied. And I would submit to you, I actually don't think that that is a bug of the human condition. I think it's a feature. I think it's part of how God made you. C.S. Lewis, a long time ago in his book, *Mere Christianity*, tried to tap into this idea, this itch. And he said, you know, if I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for a different world. And so today, as we kind of wrap up a season of Advent, which is just a word that means the coming or the arrival where we've waited this season, we look forward to like the coming of the long promised Messiah, I think at the end it's great to pause and consider that it's a great and relevant season, not only because we're looking back to what Jesus did, but looking forward to what he's going to do. Like we're looking forward to the unbreaking of the world when God makes all things new. And that means in some sense your entire life as a follower of Jesus is lived in a season of Advent, kind of in this tension between the way things are and what has already been given and the way things should be, like the things were waiting to come. And so against that backdrop, for this sermon today, I'd really just like to put before you and consider one statement, like one bold statement, one kind of crazy hypothesis, which I will say is admittedly a charged and controversial thing to say really in any period of history, but particularly in ours. And that idea is simply this, Jesus is the answer to what every heart is really longing for.

Now before we just run past that, as we often do in a church setting, and say, oh, of course that's true, you know, I want to think about what that actually means, right? Because again, at church, it's really easy to kind of do that thing you used to do in kids ministry, right? Where like, the answer, like if you don't know the answer, you weren't listening, you just say Jesus, right? Like you're pretty sure if you say Jesus, you're kind of close to right, you know? And so there's this kind of religious way to just say, of course it is, but think what that would mean if that's true.

That would mean everything you've ever hoped for in your life. A spouse, family, legacy, wealth, purpose, health, every heartbreak that didn't come true, every happily ever after that did come true, every life goal, every victory, every defeat, all of those longings, the ones you got and the ones you didn't somehow are pointing you back to an itch that none of them can scratch, a part of you that can't be filled. That's not a statement to be taken lightly, to say that Jesus is the answer to all that.

I also know, for those of you in the room who are not followers of Jesus, a statement like that honestly probably sounds at best ridiculous, or at worst kind of condescending and offensive, like I don't know anything about you, or billions of other people on the planet, like all of those life experiences, all of those different beliefs, and I'm going to audaciously stand up here and say, that this religious belief is what every one of them is longing for. I don't understand that thought.

Part of my hope is that by the end of this kind of short sermon today, you'll see that what Jesus is offering is not just one more religious belief amongst the thousands of options, but it is actually an invitation into life, like into something that is really real, like a real life that's a different kind of life beyond just the brutal reality of what life hits us with every day.

[8 : 23] That's kind of my hope, but even if you leave unconvinced of that, I would offer that I bet on some level that itch that can't be scratched is true for you too. I mean, one of the great mysteries of the human condition is that we can never seem to be satisfied, and you don't have to look to the Christian tradition to find that. Like, the history of all the centuries is full of stories and poems and philosophies and discourses that wrestle with that part of the human condition.

Why does nothing ever satisfy us? Why are we always looking for something more? Blaise Pascal was a 15th century mathematician and physicist, and he tried to speak into that.

When he wrote this, he said, there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.

Now, before we get to the part where he answers the question, right, where he says, hey, the only thing that can fill that vacuum is God revealed through Jesus Christ, like, let's focus on the first part for a minute. And note, he's a scientist, so he's being really precise here.

So you might have actually heard that quote. A lot of people over time have kind of morphed that quote into, there's a God-shaped hole in the heart of each of us. But notice, he didn't say hole. He said vacuum. And that's really important because what he knew, studying nature, is that vacuum can't exist in nature. Like, the phrase goes, if you're an engineer like me, nature abhors a vacuum, right? And that's because a vacuum demands to be filled.

[10 : 08] When a vacuum is exposed to anything else, it sucks in anything and everything it can to fill that void. It can't just stay open. And it is never satisfied until it's fully filled.

And if you'll permit me a short side road, I actually think understanding that reality or not realizing that that's true about yourself or about others around you is one of the ways that leads to some of the darkest places in humanity. Here's what I mean by that. So, there's a scene in the movie Tombstone, right? And it kind of gets lost. It's a really poignant scene that can get lost in kind of all the shooting and really whip our tay, right?

But it's this scene where Wyatt Earp is kind of preparing for this final showdown with Johnny Ringo, who's the leader of the Cowboys gang. And he's got time to think about it. And part of what he's thinking about is like, I'm not sure I can win this. But he's also really trying to figure out what makes this man tick. And so, he asks his friend Doc Holliday, he says, Doc, what makes a man like Ringo tick? Like, why does he do the things he does? And Doc says, you know, a man like Johnny has a great big hole right to the middle of him. And he can never steal enough or kill enough to fill it up. And Wyatt says, what does he need? And Doc says, revenge. He says, for what? And Doc says, being born. You know, once you realize that nothing in this world is going to fill you, that no amount of sex or success or family or money is going to do it, you arrive at a really dark place. I mean, it's so common, it's cliché.

Why are some of the most successful people in life the most depressed and the most angry and the most cruel? Because they know something that if you haven't reached that, you can only speculate about. They know it's not going to do it. They know if I get everything I want, I will still be unsatisfied. And when you come to that place, there's simply nothing left in life.

And that's a dark place. And that is what Advent is actually really about. It's about the hope that that longing inside of you actually can be filled.

[12 : 49] That there, though the waiting is long, there actually is a morning coming. Like there actually is a better world on the way. I mean, think about the songs, like the words to some of our Christmas songs.

Like they actually testify to this. Long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. That is a hope that is a long way from jingle bells.

That's something else that the author of that is waiting on. So today, we're going to look at that hope through one simple passage in Luke's gospel. And we're going to see what happens when people encounter that Advent hope and what it means for us today.

So we're going to be looking real briefly in Luke chapter 2, verses 22 through 38. This is a scene where Mary and Joseph, the time has arrived for them to take Jesus up to Jerusalem according to the tradition of the law.

[14 : 02] And it says this, Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.

And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit to the temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom law, he took him in his arms, and he blessed God, and he said, Lord, now you are letting your servant departing peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

And his father and mother marveled at what was said, and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many of Israel, and for a sign that is opposed, and a sword will pierce your own soul also, so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

[15 : 35] And there was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. And she was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was 84.

She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day, and coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

This is God's word to us. Now, this passage speaks a lot of profound truths to us, but I want to look at just a few simple ways I think it speaks into our longings.

And I think the first thing this passage shows us that honestly may seem a little too on the nose, but it's still really relevant. I think firstly it shows us God may not work on the same timetable as us, but he never forgets our longings or his promise.

Our longing to have this desire fulfilled, this itch that can't be scratched, scratched, and the agony of waiting are mirrored in lives all throughout Scripture and in the lives of these two people.

[16 : 49] I mean, think about what they've seen. And Simeon is a man waiting his whole life for a promise. And then when he gets it, he says, I'm ready to go home, like I'm ready to depart in peace.

And Anna, in her long life as a widow, it says she was married for seven years and then her husband dies and now she's been widowed for the rest of her life. She finds her fulfillment in this moment as well.

And note that neither one of them were waiting on the start of some new religious movement. Neither one of them were waiting on a new system or a way to do church.

Like the words this passage uses on what they took this moment to mean are things like consolation, salvation, like big things, the rising and the falling of things, the revealing of hearts.

The redemption of Jerusalem. Those are the things they were waiting on and they saw it in this moment. And in this waiting, this kind of groaning that Scripture says, we see it all throughout Scripture because it's part of the journey.

[18 : 07] Like it's seen in a people waiting for delivery in Egypt for years and years to get out of slavery. It's seen in a long period of silence between the Old Testament and this moment.

Like I always find it interesting when we do the Christmas story, there is a long, long time between the last words that God speaks in the Old Testament and when Jesus shows up.

That's an agony of waiting. We see it in the personal lives of these two people. And there's so much we could say about that, but I mean the simple encouragement for followers of Jesus is this.

Just like these people did, don't give up. Like don't stop waiting. Don't stop looking. Keep on asking for God to reveal His glory because God doesn't forget or fail.

But maybe even more profound than that lesson is another truth we learn in this passage, which is we learn that the answer to our longing isn't actually a place or an experience or a piece of knowledge or wisdom.

[19 : 15] The answer is a person. I mean this longing, this itch, this vacuum, it can't be satisfied with just anything. It actually demands relationship.

And that's really profound. It means it demands intimacy, which means it can't be filled by anything other than a person. But not just any person.

I mean, you know, anyone who's ever tried to shoulder the burden of being someone else's everything knows that's a weight no human can carry.

Like I think it's one of the easiest mistakes that anyone can make as a friend, as a spouse, as a parent, is to put on someone else or expect them to fill all the empty places in you, to complete you, to be all the things you need them to be.

If you've ever tried that, you know that number one, it is a soul-crushing adventure for the person you put it on. Like no human can bear that. And also, it's really disappointing for you, right?

[20 : 26] Because you thought this person was it. This is the thing. This relationship is the thing that's going to give meaning and purpose to my life. And when it doesn't, you get really mad at that person.

So that means we need this thing to be filled by a person, but whoever that person is, they have to be, for lack of a better word, enough. Like they have to be big enough and inexhaustible enough to somehow fill a vacuum that always wants more.

And the only one that can pull that off is God. Like he's the only one who's infinite. And that's why Jesus is who he had to be. He's fully man because we need a person.

And he's fully God because only God is big enough. I mean, how can you be both of those things at once? I mean, like, think about that. Fully man, like, so familiar to us that it's actually not overwhelming.

It's an inviting relationship. We can actually believe Jesus knows who we are, that he can actually meet us where we are, but also so fully God that this inexhaustible desire we have in us never gets tired of him.

[21 : 39] Like however big our desire is, God gets bigger. And then our desire gets even bigger, and then God gets even bigger. Like how can that exist in one person?

I don't know. And frankly, I don't think anybody else does either. Like it's kind of one of the big mysteries of Scripture, like how God and man can be made flesh incarnate.

But even if we don't understand it, we can let it teach us some things about what that means for us. And I think here are just some simple lessons we can take for that.

If that's the truth, then it means number one, God loves us up close. The God you see in Jesus is not a God loving us or judging us from some ivory tower.

It is a God that is demonstrating he wants to be with us. I mean, however much you don't understand about what God does or doesn't, what he has allowed or what he hasn't allowed, the one thing that you can't say is that he's aloof because he came right down to be in it.

[22 : 49] Like he is a God who wants to be in the mud with us. And if that's true, it also means something else really important, which is God actually knows what it's like to be you.

Jesus is fully God, but he is also fully man. Fully man. Not like some parlor trick.

He knows what it is like to be a man or woman in this world. Every temptation, every sorrow, every longing that we feel he's felt, which means he's not put off by them.

He doesn't look at the things you feel, the sorrows you have, and just kind of say, tut, tut, you know? Poor pitiful things. He looks on us with compassion because he's walked it.

He longs for us even when we've stopped longing for ourselves. In Hebrews, you know, it's just one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture.

[23 : 58] Hebrews 4, 15, and 16, it says, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who is in every respect, tempted as we were, yet without sin.

So let us then with confidence draw near to his throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. You know, I don't know what vision you have of Jesus, like what story you've been told about him, but to look on him is to look on the friendly and compassionate heart of God.

Like that verse says, you should move towards God with confidence, not in yourself, but because he knows what it's like to be you. He is not unable to sympathize.

When you bring your failures and your sins, the movement of his heart is like, I can't believe we're still doing this. Like, are we still on this? Like, you know, 70 times, like, are we still on that?

Like, that's not how he feels about it. Every time, every time, his compassion rises to meet our failure.

[25 : 08] And not in a place of just pure academic holiness from a place that actually felt it. And if any of that is true, I think it means one other glorious thing.

It means the best promises are yet to come. You know, Jesus coming as the fulfillment of an Advent season, it's not just the answer to a promised past.

It's a guarantee of a promised future. And that's where our hope really resides. Like, if you look at Simeon's words in that passage when he was ready to go home, when his life, he had seen the coming of the Lord.

It speaks not to just what he got to see, but what it would mean for everyone. Like, it wasn't just like, it's finished now and I can go.

It's like, he got to see the salvation of the Lord, and he saw what it meant for the world to come. And that's why he could retire home in peace.

[26 : 10] You know, most cultures, most religions, almost everyone in the world have some stories about the end of all things, right?

And there's some common themes. Destruction, judgment, maybe even the hope of a new world sometimes. But ultimately, if that's all they are, if they're just stories, then they're just wishes.

They're just dreams. They're a hollow hope. And if you wonder why we focus so much on Jesus in this church, that's it.

Because the reality of his life and death are more than just a story. Like, they're a well-documented fact of history. Like, we look back to the gift of his spirit and what the Comforter did, not just in ages past, but what he does amongst us right now, because it's a testimony.

It's an evidence. It's a guarantee, Scripture says, of what's to come. It is an ever-reminding promise that it's not some fairy tale.

[27 : 20] In Ephesians 1, it says, In him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

So not just a religious exercise. Like, the things that God does in and through his spirit, in and through his people, through his church, it's meant to be a reminder that that itch you have that can't be scratched, it's not a bug, it's a feature.

He wants you to keep wanting more. And day by day, he wants to keep reminding you it's good for you to want that. It's not going to lead you to a place of despair. It's going to lead you to a place of glory.

And so as we go in this next year and, you know, we embark on whatever that year is going to have, a new journey for us as a church, I'm sure things in our personal lives, I would ask us, I would invite us to just invite that reality into ourselves and our church over and over.

May this place, may our prayer be that this place is a place where we always point to God the Son because of what it means for that hope.

[28 : 46] We always welcome God the Spirit because of what it reminds us. We always trust God the Father because he's given us those things. We welcome him in to do the good works as he pleases.

And if we do that, we're going to remind ourselves and we're going to hold out a light to those around us that's this simple message.

There is actually hope for tomorrow. The best actually is to come. Praise be. Amen. So as the band comes up, if you're here today and you're not a follower of Jesus, again, man, thank you for coming.

Again, I have no idea where you're at in your life or why you're here. Maybe you came because you were searching or because you were made. What I do know is you have value.

And what I do know is that if you're like any other human, you have longings deep down inside. You have places, you have itches that never seem to get scratched.

[29 : 50] Or maybe you're just here because you're feeling the weight of your own brokenness. Like you know a lot of what's wrong in your life is because of you. You don't know how to get out of that.

I'd invite you to approach Jesus. Like if you don't know where to start, I always think a simple place you can start is just simply ask Jesus, you know, I don't know if all that's real, but I want it to be.

Make yourself real to me. Just ask him to give you a glimpse into if that's really a fairy tale or it's real reality. He's what you're seeking. And he's compassionate.

Whatever you think, whatever image you've been given, he wants you to come. If you are a follower of Jesus, man, may we be a people who always long for better things.

Don't feel guilty about not being satisfied about what you've seen of God. That is not a desire that God looks down on. His call to you is not to just be fine with what you've seen.

[30 : 53] He wants you to want more. Never stop desiring his kingdom. A people who cling to Jesus. A people who want his Holy Spirit. Who never give in to despair.

If you need that, this is just a good moment to ask for that. To just pause and say, God, I want more of you. I am not satisfied with what I've seen.

Maybe you're at the other end where you just kind of feel numb. It's a place to ask for that to be reignited. I find that usually when I'm numb, it's because I'm starting to submit to the lie that it's never going to be enough.

Like I'm starting to fall in that trap of what leads the whole world to despair. Like I'm never going to be satisfied. Remind yourself. Ask God to remind you of that.

This altar, this place of prayer is for you. We're going to take communion together. So after you've prayed and you're ready, you can go to the communion table.

[31 : 59] It's just another reminder. It's like, it's a reminder that the promise is a person. A person not unacquainted with your weakness and a person who is willing to give up his very body, his very blood.

Who wants to share that life with you. So just ask him, God, in this moment as I take these elements, like ignite something new in me. Like ignite a new hope.

Ask and keep on asking as the scripture says. Knock and keep on knocking. Take a moment and do that before him. Father, we give this moment to you.

May your spirit push out whatever darkness is in the hearts of the precious souls gathered here. May your spirit speak a greater truth that somehow, even if our situation doesn't change tomorrow, our hope does.

Somehow we just know there is hope in life on the way. God, I just, I do pray for everyone in here that in the situations of life, like whatever everyone in here is facing, that you will step in in surprising, unexpected ways.

[33 : 20] But whatever our situations teach us, God, I pray you would teach our heart somehow to keep desiring and to keep going. Grant us that grace, Father, in Jesus' name.

Amen.