

“Advent Hope”

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Mark 13:24-37

November 29, 2020

The last end of the world flick I watched was several years ago now, if memory serves...if often does not. It was called 2012 and it was based on the belief that the world ended when the Mayan calendar ran out. It was a fairly typical movie of that genre. And while that genre is not as much in style today as it was in the late 1990's and early 2000's, I'm sure there's someone out there penning the next great “end of the world” movie.

After all, they're not hard to plot out or write even. Start with an impending “end-of-the-world disaster. Throw in tons of special effects, add a measure of melodramatic, gut-wrenching storylines and cap it all off with a select number of people alive and set to rebuild things in the new future at the end. Hope amid the burning embers of destruction.

But the more and more I think about it, I think these movies appeal to us for two reasons. First and probably most importantly, I think we all recognize on a near-daily basis that this world desperately requires revamping. But second, and not to be missed, the payoff is always that human ingenuity and derring-do will somehow manage to allow disaster to avert the end of the world.

Disaster flicks appeal to our human awareness that something here is dreadfully wrong and that we're the exact people to change it all. All that to say, it's an appealing fiction.

The fact of the matter is that in neigh over 6000 years of human civilization, we haven't made a whole lot of improvements.

“Now hold on a second,” you might say. “Pastor Jason, of COURSE we've gotten better. And, to be sure, in some ways, we've made some slight improvements through the years. But make no mistake about it, many of us mistake technological progress for honest-to-goodness improvement. And, believe me, to some degree, I completely understand.

After all, in this Brave New World, I can get my groceries delivered, have access to more entertainment options than you can shake a stick at delivered speedily to the comfort of my living room. Virtual reality machines can transport me to distant planets or in a 3-d replica of the Notre Dame cathedral. Better still, we're enjoying longer lives, greater access and awareness to how to manage our bodies and their illnesses. Heck, compared to life in 1980 where there were maybe 5 channels on TV and a call to a grocery store to have something delivered would've seen you laughed at like some relic from the 1950's, the 2020's should be a virtual paradise.

But are they? Maybe not so much, right?

I read a story recently about a young girl, a fourth grader who came home from school one day and rushed up the stairs. “It was obvious to her mom that she was *both* angry and sad. Her sobs failing to drown out her footsteps as she stomped up the stairs.

When her mom went into inquire about what was going on, the little girl responded “It was an AWFUL day.” She went on to say, when she looked for her homework, she realized she'd left it at home. The normally delightful teacher snarled at her for this oversight and made her visit the principal. The choices for lunch were all of her least favorites. When they broke for recess, her BFF decided to play with someone else. On the bus ride home, an older boy picked on her the whole way.”

These kinds of days still happen, right? They do to me and I certainly don't feel like the saddest sack in the world so I'm sure they do to you, as well. This world is still as heartbreaking at times as it ever was. Just as it was to that little girl on that day, long ago.

But, after a period of sobbing, the little girl's resolve strengthened, and she told her mother she was all right. Mom, having other things to do left and went back downstairs. But then, after having it be “too quiet” for too long, back up the stairs Mom went.

Much to her amazement, the little girl was on her knees praying. When it appeared as though she was finished, the mother asked what the prayer was for.

The little girl candidly responded. “*Mom, I've decided I don't like this world, so I'm praying for a whole new one.*”

In a way, that little girl had found the core cause for Biblical Hope. Biblical Hope isn't based on the idea that this world gets better. Rather it is focused upon the belief that one day, through the return of Jesus Christ, this world will be drawn to a close and merged with heaven. God's space and our space will be once space yet again.

Revelation 21:1-5 reads, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Biblical hope rests on this coming to reality. But notice, it is GOD who makes all things new, not us.

Which is exactly why the Bible is so emphatic that God alone is the one we are to put our hope in. The key here is that we're not to trust a lot of things we much more readily place our hopes upon.

One of the things I notice myself doing quite frequently now is placing a whole lot of hope in the things in my life. More frequently than not, I wrongly hope that the things I can acquire will make me better, happier even. But time and time again, that's proven to be demonstrably false. When I look back at the garbage of my life, what I generally find is shattered hopes that something would make my world better. It began long ago, at Christmas time when all I wanted was a Tyco electric racing set. Oh, they were all the rage in my day.

Christmas arrived and, there it was, a brand-new Tyco electric slot-car racing set. My dad assembled it as I waited with glee. Here was the very thing to make my life perfect.

Nope. Didn't happen. Those cars rarely stayed on the track and, if they did, one side always got more power so the car on that track always won. Far from fun, a major disappointment.

Oh, if only I'd learned that lesson there. Yesterday, in fact, I caught myself greedily inspecting a rice cooker on Amazon and I heard that old, familiar voice that's never left me – "Jason, it said, with that fancy rice cooker, you'll be so much happier."

A lie perhaps as old as time itself.

No, placing our hope on things in this life is a fool's errand.

Jesus diverts us away from placing our hope in the things of this world. In

Matthew 6:19-20 we hear Him say this, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

And if that isn't clear enough, **1 John 2:15-16** puts it this way – "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world."

These are just a couple of places where the Bible warns us against placing our trust in the things of this world.

But what about US?

I mean, after all, we're the one who gets things done, aren't we? By human ingenuity we've reached the moon and cured scores of illnesses that would've been fatal 100 years ago. Surely we can trust people.....

Do I even need to say it?

No, people might be trustworthy, but we can't bear the weight of our hopes for the future.

Again, the Scripture is clear as a bell on this point.

Psalms 146:3 – "Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish."

Psalms 33:16-17 – "The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue."

But perhaps clearest of all comes Jeremiah, "Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land."

I've been to that place, unfortunately, more times than I care to admit. The "curse" here spoken of from placing our hopes in humans is that, ultimately, you'll end up in a land called hopelessness. I've got to tell you, it's the kind of place where you wouldn't want even your enemy to swell in long. Nothing so thoroughly wrecks our lives than to stay in that barren waste land for very long.

Don't overlook this, *abandoning our hope in people means necessarily that we let go of the belief that we ourselves can manage this place all by ourselves and without any assistance from God.*

I chose to live out the fullness of belief in myself until I was nearly 30. Let's just say, it didn't end well. Except, well, now that I think about it...it did.

When you reach then end of things, of other people, of yourself then you can't help but reach out your hand to God. I reached the end of myself and thanks to you people, I discovered real HOPE.

David does this so beautifully in Psalm 38.

There, David reaches the end of himself, his strength, his own self-inspired hope. Then and there he cries out to God, "But for you, O Lord, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer."

David places his HOPE in the Lord and His care.

Because you see, that HOPE will never disappoint. Hope in the Lord won't see your electric slot cars sliding off the track nor will it find you cursed in the land of hopelessness. Because placing our hope in God NEVER disappoints.

Biblical hope isn't akin to other kinds. Hope in the Lord isn't, for example, the way I hope for another Atlanta Braves World Series. I hope, but to be honest, I'm not sure it'll happen again soon. Hope in God isn't like that.

But, you might ask, how do we know.

We know because of what we're all preparing for. Whether it's decorating our houses or this church, thanks to all the people who helped do that, by the way, whether it's buying presents or plotting out menus for holiday feasts, what we're really doing is waiting on Jesus arrival.

We know our hope in the Lord is not in vain because on a December night, long ago, something happened. The Lord our God heard our cries and took world-changing action. Into this world came none other than God Himself in human flesh, a double miracle. God entered into the time and space He created and He did so as both fully human and fully God.

The reason of course He did so was obvious. We'd messed things up. From our transgression in the Garden of Eden right up unto this very day, our sin, our idolatry, our placing our hope in the things of this world has led to ongoing ruination.

But God couldn't stand by. I understand that, in a human way. When my kids are hurting, it's hurts me too. God, who is love, chose to take action. Jesus Christ came into this world, unheralded and relatively unknown. And what he came to do was to reconcile wayward humanity back into full fellowship with God. He came to conquer the power of the evil one and sin over our lives. Jesus came to liberate us from this terribly broken world.

We who were yet but sinners were, in Christ's incarnation, given the greatest gift of all – HOPE.

Not in the things of this worlds, not in our friends or families and certainly not in ourselves. Jesus came as a perfect, in flesh reminder that we must always place our HOPE in the way-making God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and you and me. For this is a hope which will never, ever disappoint.

Romans 5 says it better – "and hope [in God] does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Amen and amen and amen.

Scripture

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