

Small Group Study Guide

“What Christmas Teaches us about Hope” | World-Changing Words Advent Series | From Sunday December 1, 2019

Appetizer:

Question: Reminisce about some of the things you hoped for as a kid when it came to Christmas time and gifts.

Get someone to read Isaiah 2:1-5 out loud to the group. Then choose another individual to read the passage through a second time, to allow the words to sink in. Sometimes its helpful to read the same passage again in a different Bible Version, just to get a different feel for the passage. It’s also really helpful to hear Scripture read twice with different voices.

A couple questions from the passage:

Why was the temple or the mountain as a central gathering place for the nations such an important part of the hope that Isaiah was envisioning?

When you hear the passage about weapons being turned into farming tools, what comes to mind? Do you believe this vision that Isaiah had of the future is something that North American Christians think about when it comes to their concerns about the “end times” or how things are going to end? Why or why not?

What do you think a modern picture of this “weapons into tools” would look like?

Main Course:

In the sermon it was mentioned that there is a big difference between optimism and Christian hope. Optimism was described as being about anticipating a change in circumstances. Christian hope was described as anticipating and waiting on a person.

Question: How does this view of hope change our outlook in life?

Is there any room for optimism (a change in circumstances) in the Christian life, or is hope always only about a person, namely God? How do we

resolve the tension between these two ideas (hoping for a change in circumstances vs. waiting on God)?

The pastor used an illustration about stargazing, suggesting that looking at the night sky is a unique experience because we are actually looking at the past in the presence. This is because the stars we are seeing are so far away that, even at the speed of light, it takes many years for the light that we’re seeing today to reach us. Mind-blowing stuff.

Questions: How does this illustration relate to our own journey of “anticipating the future by looking to the past?” What things have occurred in our past that give us hope for the future? Specifically, what has God done for us in the past, that gives us assurance for the future?

Dessert:

Google the words for the hymn, “The Solid Rock.” Have someone read the whole thing out, or, if you are comfortable, sing the chorus once together.

Challenge: We were left with a challenge from Sunday to “wrap ourselves in Jesus Christ.” What does that look like for us this season? Secondly, we were challenged to be “people of hope” by seeking moments of reconciliation or bringing people together. What will you commit to this Christmas season when it comes to living out a bit of Isaiah 2:1-5 amongst your family, friends, neighbours and co-workers? Once everyone has had a turn to talk, pray for one another, that the Spirit would empower them to live out Christian hope in the days ahead.