



good shepherd
presbyterian church

Reason to Hope

Psalm 33

Sermon by: Robert Austell

November 29, 2020

Are you ready for God to show up? I know I am. I don't know if you can even remember this, but at the end of 2019 people were saying, "Wow, what a year, 2020 can only go up from here!" And then all.the.things.

I know I am desperate for God to hear us, eager for God to help us, and ready for God to move us forward.

That's what Advent is all about. Today is the first Sunday of Advent, a "season" of the church year in which we prepare for the coming of the Lord. There's kind of a dual layer to that. We are waiting, as it were, with the 1st century people of God for the coming of God's anointed. But we are also waiting for Christ's return, to set all things right. The main idea is this: we are eager for the Lord's help and hope in God's faithfulness in keeping His promises!

So today we focus on the theme of HOPE. It is a common theme in scripture, for all the same reasons I just mentioned. Today I want to look with you at Psalm 33 and the themes of hope found there. It begins with an invitation to worship – to sing, praise, and thank God. Then it lifts up two reasons to hope and invites us to that hope. Let's look together...

Reason to Hope #1: the Word and Work of the Lord

After the opening invitation to worship, vv.4-12 give us the first reason to hope: it's because of what God has said and done: "*For the word of the Lord is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness.*" (v.4)

The Psalm goes on to describe God's WORD in a number of ways.

Upright (v.4): Upright means good and righteous, full of integrity and truth. God is as good as His Word!

Creative (vv.6-7): The Psalmist provides some wonderful descriptions and imagery of God creating the world by his Word... making the heavens, breathing their inhabitants, gathering the waters as a heap, and laying up the deeps in storehouses.

Powerful (vv.8-10): Continuing the implications of creating, we hear about God's awesome power over the earth and its nations. God "spoke, and it was done..." (v.9) The greatest plans of rulers and nations are as nothing compared to the Lord (as so later in the Psalm with their armies).

Eternal (vv.11-12): And God's Word is not just powerful; God's counsel is eternal, standing forever, from generation to generation. This is a theme echoed throughout scripture, offered in this context as a reason to hope!

And the Psalm describes God's WORK with another list of attributes in vv.4-5: All God's work is done in *faithfulness*! God loves *righteousness* and *justice*. And setting up the descriptions of creation, the Psalmist tells us that the earth is full of the *lovingkindness* of the Lord.

Particularly when we become discouraged at the seeming lack of those traits in the world, we have reason to hope. All summer and fall we've read it: this is what God is like and it's what God wants us to be like: faithful, righteous, just, and loving. This is how we are to bless the community around us and the world.

Reason to Hope #2: the Compassion and Care of the Lord

Verses 13-19 provide a second reason to hope: God sees us and the world, and is full of compassion and care!

I remember how Hagar named the Lord who saw her when she had run from Abraham and Sarah. She said, "You are the God who sees!" This Psalm reminds us that *God sees all humanity (vv.13-14)* and that *God made us and understands us (v.15)*.

Contrasting God's power and salvation with that of the most powerful human kings and armies, the Psalmist reminds us that true and lasting *deliverance is from God, not human power (vv. 16-17)* and that includes the most extreme situations, even *from death and famine (v. 19)*.

A good summary verse of this section and our second reason to hope is verse 18: *"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness..."*

Sometimes I listen to songs to encourage me, remember things from long ago, or to simply settle my mind. That's what the Psalms do – they are songs of the highest order. Psalm 33 is a perfect example, inviting us to sing along in worship and giving us reasons to hope! And so the Psalm ends up with a declaration and determination to WAIT and hope in the Lord.

Waiting in Hope (vv. 20-22)

I've never put waiting and hope together, but it makes all the sense in the world. If you didn't have to wait, it wouldn't be hope any more. Hope looks ahead in faith to something yet to be. It has to involve waiting. And the end of this Psalm makes clear that our waiting (and our hope!) is not in vain because of the One in whom we hope. Indeed, God is "our help and our shield" (v.20), reason to hope because of what God has said and done, and because of what God is like.

We, in turn, are to be patient, joyful, trusting, and hopeful; and how could we not be if we really understand who it is in whom we have placed our hope!

Easy to say; hard to do, right? Let me offer some specific takeaways from this song/Psalm to help with the waiting and to help with hope.

Focus on the two reasons to hope: God's actions and God's character.

TAKE TIME to list out for yourself what God has said and done in your life. It may help to use the first part of this Psalm as a template, but plug in your own examples of times you believe God has spoken or moved in your life. What did you learn about God and about yourself?

TAKE TIME to list out for yourself what God is like, not just in this Psalm or other scripture, though that can be helpful to get you started. But how have you experienced God's character? How has God seen you and cared for you?

PRAY to God for help waiting and hoping. And don't just skip to this; that's wishing for a magical solution when God has spelled out in this scripture steps you can take to help equip you for that task.

I believe God will honor these actions and prayers, and that is my hope and prayer for each of you as we begin this Advent season. Amen.