

Hope – God Promises

Luke 2:38

Rev. Brian Bill

December 10-11, 2016

Opening Video: Christmas Mystery

Welcome: Pastor Brian

Thanks for joining us this weekend as we give glory to God by celebrating the good news of great joy! We have free coffee in the gym after the service today. Jesus has entered space and time out of love for you...He wants to know you and wants you to know Him!

We're in a Christmas series we're calling, *From Creation to Consummation* to help us see that the coming of Christ is the main event of the entire Bible – from Genesis to the Book of Revelation.

Our focus this weekend is on the theme of Hope as we ponder the promises of God that have been fulfilled in the Christmas narrative. Most of the message today will be communicated through music through our children and adult choirs, instrumentalists and worship band.

Next weekend we'll ponder the fact that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. Our Christmas Eve services, at 3 and 5 pm, will center on the truth of the Incarnation – God has come. On Christmas Day, we'll have one service at 10 am as we look at the ultimate demonstration of God's love.

Christmas is all about coming. God the Father came to us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ...to save us from our sins. And now we in turn can come to Him to have our hope restored. The key is to come. Amazingly, there are well over 2,000 times in the Bible that the word, "**come**" is used.

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 11:28 – "***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***" Revelation 22:17 says, "***The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'*** And let the one who hears say, '***Come.***' And let the one who is thirsty ***come***; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.'"

Let's come and behold Him now as we hail the Savior's birth! Please stand as I pray and then we'll sing, "O Come All Ye Faithful."

Opening Song: "O Come All Ye Faithful"

Offering: Pastor Brian

Offertory: Shines the Light

Message

I really like those words – when Jesus was born the night was lit with hope and promise and on the day He died, the day was dimmed with grief and sorrow.

And our lives today are filled with a combination of hope and hopelessness, of promise and problems.

That reminds of Larry and Elmer who were out hunting in the woods and got lost. Trying to reassure his friend, Larry said, "*Don't lose hope. All we have to do is shoot into the air three times, stay where we are, and just hope that someone finds us.*" They shot into the air three times, but no one came. After a while, they tried again but there was still no response. They decided to try once more but not before Elmer said, "*I hope it works this time. We're down to our last three arrows.*"

Perhaps you feel like you're down to your last three arrows...

Some of you are feeling hopeless and helpless...unhappy and sad...your days have been decimated by disappointment as your expectations have evaporated...sadness and sorrow...loss and lament...relational ruptures...death and distance.

Glitter and good cheer have been replaced with littered lives and great fear...

The gap between the Christmas IDEAL and what's REAL can leave us feeling disappointed, discouraged and in despair.

Instead of a Norman Rockwell painting, many of us are experiencing some version of National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation.

All this makes it hard to cope at Christmas...

If we were to take a survey we would find that hope is hard to find during the holidays. It's tough to sing, "Joy to the World" when there's so much junk in our lives and in world.

Hope is not only hard to find; it's difficult to define. Some equate hope with an optimistic feeling that all will turn out well. We hear this every spring from Cubs fans...only now they can say it with some authority! For some it's wishful thinking whether it's related to the weather: "*I hope it's nice today*" or a general feeling that some desire will be fulfilled.

Here's a biblical definition of hope that we can hold onto: *Hope is longing for what God has already promised us.*

In the Old Testament hope means, "*to bind together, often by twisting.*" It refers to the process of making a rope by taking two strands of material and twisting them together. Understood in this way, hope means that I bring my pain to the Lord on the one hand and on the other hand I hold to specific promises of God. To hope means to wrap my problems together with God's promises.

We could say it this way: *Hold on to the rope of hope when it's hard to cope.*

The word "hope" is used some 52 times in the New Testament and is always connected in some way to God; that's enough hope for every week of the year!

By its very definition hope is something that is invisible. Romans 8:24-25: "***For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.***"

These two verses teach that if we're going to *hold on to the rope of hope so that we can cope*, we must embrace its past, present and future dimensions. When your grip begins to slip, hold on to...

1. Past Promises. The Old Testament looks forward to the coming of Christ as God progressively reveals His plan to send His promised One. In Isaiah 64:1 the prophet longingly pleads: "***Oh, that you would rend [tear, rip open] the heavens and come down...***" This was fulfilled when Jesus was given the name *Immanuel*,

which means, “*God with us.*” God came down at Christmas. In the first half of the Bible we read of people hoping and longing and waiting. After Jesus is born, we see this longing fulfilled.

2. Present Provisions. When you feel like you can’t cope, God provides hope. Psalm 46:1: “***God is an ever-present help in trouble.***” Lamentations 3:25 says that the “***Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him.***” The key isn’t to hope *for* something; but to hope *in* Someone.

When I ponder the pain and disappointment that many are going through this time of year, I often purposely mispronounce “Christmas.” It helps me to say “*Christ-mess,*” because it reminds me that Jesus has come into our mess, into our mistakes, into our pain and our problems, into our sinful world. He was born in a smelly stable, in a borrowed manger when He took on human flesh. We don’t have to clean ourselves up for Him, but rather invite Him into our mess...and He will then clean us up.

If you want to cope, hold onto the rope of hope – His *past promises*, His *present provision* and the *future fruit*.

3. Future fruit. Our senses scream that this is all there is – that life is the sum total of profession (what we do) plus possessions (what we have), and death ends it all. But this world is neither our home nor our hope. The Bible says that those who are wrapped in a relationship with Jesus Christ have the hope of heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:19: “***If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.***” To hope means to wait for future fruit. Galatians 5:5 encourages us to hang in there: “***For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.***”

Are you aware that Jesus is coming again? He came at Christmas and the Bible says that He’s coming back – we’ll focus on this New Year’s weekend. When the Scripture writers describe this event, they often link it to hope. Check out Titus 2:13: “***waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.***”

Several years ago, a government official gave out a phone number for homeowners worried about rising mortgage payments: “*The best you can do for your family is to call 1-800-995-HOPE.*” The only problem was that this was a wrong number. Do you feel like you have the wrong number for hope?

If you want to cope then hold on to the rope of hope. Here are two applications.

1. Read Scripture. Romans 15:4: *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*

2. Receive the Savior. Matthew 1:21 says that Joseph was to call him Jesus, *“because He will save His people from their sins.”* We are sinners in need of the Savior. The way to have hope is to have the Holy One in your life as Colossians 1:27 says: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

God might be trying to get your attention through all the adversity you’re going through. Maybe you’re at a place where you now realize that it’s time to hold on to *the rope of hope because you don’t know how to cope.*

Two things to do...

- **Admit your sinfulness.** 1 Chronicles 29:15 says, *“...our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.”*
- **Ask Jesus to save you.** The Savior came to save us from our sins but this is not automatic. We must ask Him to do so. If you want hope you must cry out for help.

When the angel made his announcement to the shepherds he personalized the proclamation in Luke 2:11: *“**Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.**”* Another definition of hope is “to trust.” It’s time to trust Christ *today* because he has been born *to you*. If you need some hope to help you cope than you must receive the Holy One. I heard someone say these words that are so true: *Life with Christ is an endless hope; life without Christ is a hopeless end.*

If you’re ready to be saved right now, pray this prayer with me: *Jesus, I admit that not only do I have little hope but I have a lot of garbage in my life. I own my own sinfulness and recognize that you desire to wrap yourself around me today. I want you to be my Savior. Please save me from my sins. I need your help and I need your hope. Thank you from coming to our world on Christmas. And then for dying in my place on the cross to forgive me for my sins and to give me the hope of*

heaven. I believe and I receive you into my life. I accept your free gift of salvation. If there's anything in my life that needs to change please change me. In Jesus' Name. Amen."

With Christ, you can cope as you hold on to the rope of hope.

This next song is entitled "*In the Bleak Midwinter.*" Appropriately titled for today...

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what I can, I give Him -
I give my heart.*